



**YEARS  
OF  
SERVICE**

**1929 - 1979**

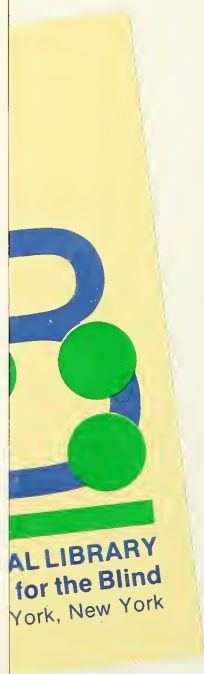
**The story of the South African  
National Council for the Blind**

**by V.H. Vaughan**

The South African National Council for the Blind was established in Cape Town on 20 March 1929 and it celebrates its Golden Jubilee this year. This commemorative issue relates the history of the origin and growth of this viable organization which during the past 50 years has built up a truly effective system for the rendering of service to the visually handicapped of all population groups in the country.

The National Council is basically a co-ordinating body to which 35 organizations are affiliated. Each one of these serves the blind population of its area in its own particular way. This includes, inter alia, the provision of social services, employment opportunities, library services, rehabilitation services, literature in braille and on tape, mobility instruction, education, training, guidance, recreational and sporting facilities, and the like. The majority of these efforts started in a small and humble way, a few even before the establishment of the National Council. With regard to this, Mr Theo Pauw, Chairman of the National Council, writes as follows in the Foreword to the book:

This historical account not only covers the first half-century of the existence of the National Council and its activities, but also takes the reader a century back to the first efforts made on behalf of the blind in this country. It is indeed a commendable story which gradually unfolded as a result of Christian compassion and humane involvement on the one hand and unwavering faith, practical acumen and









Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015

# FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE

1929-1979

THE STORY OF THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN  
NATIONAL COUNCIL  
FOR THE BLIND

by  
V. H. VAUGHAN

Translated from the original Afrikaans by Lulu Vaughan

---

EDITORIAL  
COMMITTEE:  
P. P. PEACH  
THEO PAUW  
G.S.SCHERMBRUCKER

---

PUBLISHED BY  
THE S.A. NATIONAL COUNCIL  
FOR THE BLIND

---

PRETORIA 1979

HV 2175  
V 465  
copy two

This book is dedicated to those whose selfless  
service is recorded in this history

*o, ek wens ek kon die blare se musiek volledig betas  
of die donderende see met my tong besoek  
of die blou lug in my handpalm hou*

— William Rowland  
from: *Die huis waar ek woon*  
(*The House where I Live*)  
(Tafelberg)



# CONTENTS

Foreword	i
About the Author	v
Introduction	ix
1 The Initial Phase	1
2 Co-ordination and Foundation	32
3 Early Years and Legislation (1929 - 1936)	60
4 First Years after Legislation (1936 - 1940)	88
5 Last Years of the Bowen Era (1941 - 1948)	109
6 Robert Walter Bowen (1888 - 1948)	134
7 A New Organization Pattern I (1949 - 1961)	146
8 A New Organization Pattern II (1949 - 1961)	176
9 Consolidation and Further Development I (1961 - 1979)	211
10 Consolidation and Further Development II (1961 - 1979)	238
11 Prevention of Blindness	275
12 Divisions for Indian and Coloured Blind	313
13 Four Chairmen and Two Presidents	343
14 Affiliated and Associated Bodies	384
Addendum	455
Index	464



Advocate Robert Walter Bowen, M.P. founder-member of the SA National Council for the Blind and first Chairman 1929-1948.

## FOREWORD

This book appears in the Golden Jubilee year of the South African National Council for the Blind. It is therefore a commemorative issue, although it comprises much more. It presents the interested reader with a review of the establishment and development of a viable welfare organization, but it is also the warm human narrative of a community which cares for the handicapped in its midst and which at the same time aspires to give them full opportunity to become part of the community, and to respect their right of existence on every level.

This historical account not only covers the first half-century of the existence and activities of the National Council, but also takes the reader back a century to the first efforts made on behalf of the blind in this country. It is indeed a moving story which gradually unfolded as a result of Christian compassion and humane involvement on the one hand and unwavering faith, practical acumen and perseverance on the other. The beginning of virtually every single undertaking was very modest, the odds against success were sometimes overwhelming, growth came gradually, but the fruits were richly rewarding.

The question may be asked what the community expects with regard to the education, training and general rehabilitation of the blind. A satisfactory answer cannot be given without involving the blind themselves. It does not only concern the social conscience and the prevailing norms of a civilized world at a particular time. It concerns a handicapped person, his self-image and his personal aspirations, his right to complete self-realisation as an individual amongst individuals. It does not entail mere charity and benevolence in order to cheer and encourage a handicapped person. It concerns fair and reasonable opportunities for the individual to rise above his limitations and to become a contributing member of the community by virtue of his determination and potential for achievement; not on account of what he lacks, but as a result of his inherent competence and character.

The history of services to the blind is therefore closely woven into

the story of the blind and their participation in, and contribution to the aspirations of the community. There is abundant evidence in the pages of this chronicle of the highly satisfactory and most fruitful partnership between the blind and the sighted in the gradual establishment of a better dispensation for the visually handicapped of South Africa.

After a century of service and fifty years of purposeful merging of resources, certain questions will naturally arise with those who today work together for the common cause. Where do we stand with regard to the proclaimed objectives of pioneers. What has been achieved since their first praiseworthy efforts. Do we possess the required imagination, adaptability and vision to reformulate the task in the light of the new trends, new circumstances and new approaches? Do we take sufficient cognisance of the demands, the challenges and the opportunities which a new era entails. And what should we do with regard to the considerable deficiencies which have to a greater or lesser extent been identified, and which show that blind persons are in many respects not yet enabled to turn to full account the opportunities to which they are entitled.

Another cardinal question concerns the financing and administration of services to the handicapped in general, and the visually handicapped in particular. In South Africa as well as in many other countries a commendable system of partnership has developed between the State and private efforts. Services are often provided by the State, but also originate spontaneously with individuals and groups in the community. This type of private initiative can as a rule be assured of State assistance, dependent on certain conditions. However, these services are extended, become more sophisticated, require more personnel, greater professional skill and advanced technology. The pressure on the voluntary private sector to contribute its own share of the expenses is rapidly increasing. There are limits to this source of financial assistance. There will have to be a new look at the role of the State and its financial participation in welfare services which, from the nature of things, would have been its full responsibility had voluntary efforts on the part of the public been lacking.

The S.A. National Council for the Blind expresses its thanks to the writer who has been connected with the Council and the field in which it operates for five decades. As the author of this book he could not do justice to his own immense contribution to the development of the services which were the subject of his research. He enjoys the continued



appreciation of all who are concerned with this field of endeavour, and who know him as a knowledgeable and indefatigable worker and a trusty colleague.

**THEO PAUW  
CHAIRMAN**

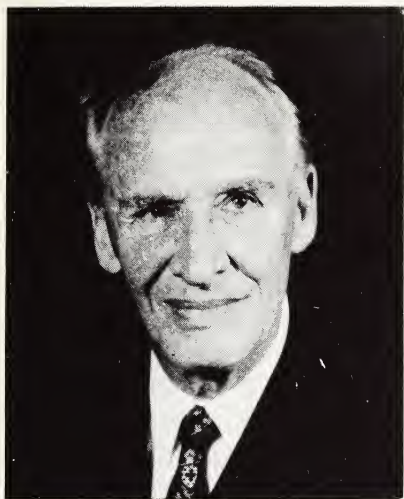
**S.A. NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND**

**WORCESTER  
MAY, 1979**



## *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

*BY THEO PAUW*



Dr V. H. Vaughan

Dr Victor Hugo Vaughan is one of the most well-known personalities on the scene of activities for and with the blind in South Africa. His own role is not sufficiently apparent in this book. It deserves wider recognition and greater appreciation than that which the writer assumes for himself.

After completing his school career at Swellendam he qualified as a teacher at the University of Stellenbosch and obtained the degrees of B.A. and B. Ed. After four years on the staff of an ordinary school at McGregor he accepted a post in 1931 as vice-principal of the School for the Blind at Worcester where he excelled as a teacher and an acknowledged authority on braille. Amongst other things he was responsible for the in-service training of the teaching staff, and took the initial steps in connection with the education of partially sighted children.

From April 1950 to June 1954 he was Principal of the School for the Physically Handicapped at Kimberley; after that (1954 — 1958) Principal of the Trans-Oranje School for the Deaf in Pretoria, and subsequently Inspector of Education (Special Schools) from 1958 to 1965. After his retirement from the Department of Education, Arts and Science he was on the staff of the University of South Africa as a senior lecturer in Orthopaedagogics for  $10\frac{1}{2}$  years on a permanent, and a further 4 years on a part-time basis. In this capacity he made an enduring contribution in connection with the training of personnel for special education. Not only did he lay the foundation for this new service but also personally conducted the courses in connection with the education of the blind and the partially sighted.

During 52½ years of service on the educational scene he left a deep impression in many fields. Under his guidance the first blind pupils passed the matriculation examination at the Worcester School for the Blind in 1943. He also assisted the first blind students at Worcester with their university studies. One of his most important tasks, carried out with ingenuity and scientific accuracy, was the devising of the standardised system for Afrikaans braille in collaboration with the Afrikaans Braille Committee, appointed by the Department of Union Education. This work, which was started in 1932, continued until 1938 when the first systematic manual appeared. In 1941 he devised a system for Afrikaans braille shorthand and later introduced a course in braille shorthand and advanced typewriting at the School.

His first overseas study tour took place during those years. In 1947 he successfully completed the course of training for teachers of the blind at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, U.S.A., and also attended additional vacation courses in other centres. From 1951 to 1972 he undertook five more journeys to Europe and the U.S.A. with the object of attending conferences and engaging in study tours. Amongst other things, he was a co-founder of the World Braille Council in Paris in 1951.

His wide experience and acknowledged expertise led to his appointment to several investigatory and advisory committees over the years.

The list is impressive:

- Educational facilities for the partially sighted (1958)
- Vocational training for deaf Blacks (1960)
- Vocational training for blind Blacks (1960)
- Tape Aids for the Blind (1965)
- Educability of Chronically Sick Children (1967)
- Expansion of Educational Facilities for White Blind (1967)
- Training of Teachers for blind and deaf Blacks (1970)
- Investigation into Braille Production Units (1977)
- Subject Committee for Special Education in the Department of Education and Training in respect of cripples, the cerebral palsied, the blind and the deaf.

On the international scene he was a member of the Executive Committee of the International Council for the Education of Blind Youth (I.C.E.B.Y.) from 1962 to 1967, and a member of the editorial committee of the organization's publication, *The Educator*.

Dr Vaughan has played a leading role within the framework of the



South African National Council for the Blind. Together with Mr (later Dr) P.E. Biesenbach he attended the first biennial meeting in 1931, and presented papers from 1939 to 1946. In 1948 he was elected a member of the Executive Committee, in which capacity he has continued to serve uninterruptedly for more than 30 years. He has periodically served on practically all committees and sub-committees of the Council, and has worked in collaboration with Dr Walter Cohen and others in connection with the devising of braille systems for the languages of the Black population groups in the Republic. From 1966 to 1974 he was Vice-Chairman of the Council.

Dr Vaughan has been a frequent contributor to professional journals and was much sought after as a speaker at conferences and other gatherings.

It is impossible to do justice in this short space to the extent and meaning of his role in the interests of the handicapped. He avoids the limelight and has repeatedly declined honorary positions on important bodies, as he prefers to be free to deliver his contribution spontaneously from the floor. He participates in debates with discretion, and his well-balanced judgement at all times carries weight in conference halls. Owing to his good-natured disposition he makes friends easily in the divergent circles in which he moves. He states his convictions in a forthright but restrained manner. His calm leadership, strong intellectual gifts, wide knowledge of human nature and keen sense of humour have over the years been of inestimable value to the National Council for the Blind and to the many other bodies on which he has served, and still serves.

Dr Vaughan is first and last instance an educationist. His lasting influence on his ex-pupils and his knowledge of blindness and blind persons has become proverbial. In the execution of his life-work he has always been ably and faithfully assisted by his wife. In every walk of life they are a well-liked couple. With the ready humour which characterises the relationship between him and his blind ex-pupils and friends, he is described by them as an "honorary blind person."

Three important and well deserved awards have been made to him in his later years: the medal of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization in 1967; the R.W. Bowen Medal for Meritorious Services to the Blind, bestowed by the S.A. National Council for the Blind in 1974; and the degree of Doctor Educationis (Honoris Causa) conferred by the University of South Africa in 1973.

His name will always be associated with the first half century of the history of the South African National Council for the Blind. It is appropriate that he has been able to round off his fruitful and colourful career in our memorable jubilee year with the completion of this important and absorbing history of the Council.

## INTRODUCTION

In order to compile this history of the South African National Council for the Blind, a great deal of research work had to be done. The senior officials of the head-office of the Council and of the Divisions, as well as of the affiliated societies which I visited, rendered valuable assistance in placing the desired documents at my disposal and in supplying the required information. Their co-operation is deeply appreciated.

It was also necessary to obtain verbal information from several people who in the past were involved with the National Council. I wish to thank them for granting me hours of interviews in order to record their valuable statements and comments on tape.

Other indispensable sources of information which could not be obtained elsewhere, were the books of newspaper-cuttings kept by persons who were involved in the work in the early days. The first I wish to mention is the book of cuttings about Adv. R. W. Bowen, started by Mrs Bowen and continued by Miss A. Gillies. Mrs Agnes Schermbrucker compiled one on the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society. The third was the very valuable book of cuttings on the S.A. Library for the Blind and the weal and woe of its readers supplied by Miss Mary Spurling. I wish to thank the abovementioned persons who placed their books at my disposal.

I wish to mention another source in printed form, namely the Newsletter of the Council which was later changed to *Imfama*. From this I obtained an immense amount of data and information about people and their activities as well as of developments which took place at societies — amounting to a practically complete coverage of what was happening in the world of the blind in South Africa. *Imfama* also proved to be a controlling source for facts and dates. For this I wish to thank the editor of *Imfama*, Dr Walter Cohen.

In connection with the writing of the book and its publication in both official languages, I wish to thank Mrs L. A. Vaughan who did the translation from the original Afrikaans into English. She is com-

mended for her perseverance in bringing such an immense task to completion. I also wish to specially thank the two language revisors namely Mr Theo Pauw for the revision of the Afrikaans, and Mr J. R. Solms for the revision of the English text. Their penetrative and critical approach is highly appreciated. The writer also wishes to thank them for valuable suggestions in connection with the contents.

My sincere thanks are offered to the Editorial Committee who, from the time of their appointment by the Executive Committee, assisted me with advice, and kept a watchful eye on the progress of the book. They are:

Mr. P. P. Peach (convener), Mr Theo Pauw and Mr G. S. Scherm-bucker.

In conclusion I wish to express my appreciation to those members of the staff of head-office who were burdened with the routine work. Firstly I wish to mention Mrs H. C. MacCale, Secretary of Council, whom I often interrupted at the most awkward times to unearth documents which have long since fallen into obscurity in the musty archives of the National Council; then also my gratitude to Mrs V. H. Pond who typed the English and Mrs C. G. Phillips the Afrikaans texts of the manuscript. The accuracy, neatness and speed with which the work was done, is much appreciated.

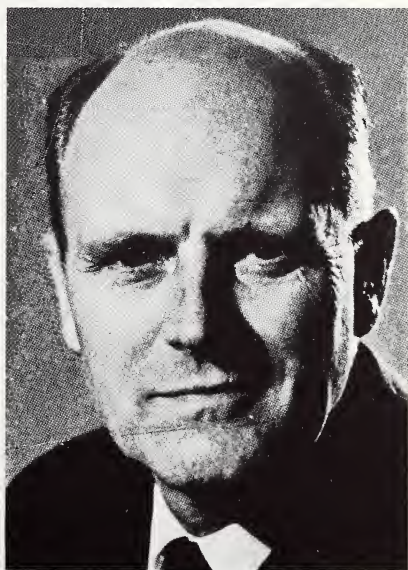
In compiling this book I was constantly mindful of those early pioneers, some of whom I knew well, who helped to shape the history of the S.A. National Council for the Blind and who are not with us today. To them we offer our thanks and pay our homage.

*The Author*





Mr C. B. Anderson, President of the S.A. National Council for the Blind and Chairman of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.



Mr Theo Pauw, Chairman of the S.A. Council for the Blind.

Members of the Executive Committee, Representatives of the Divisions for Indian Blind and Coloured Blind, Government Representatives, and Senior Members of the staff, who attended the Executive Committee meeting in October 1978 in Cape Town.



Front row: Dr. V. H. Vaughan, E. J. J. Kruger (Deputy Vice-chairman), C. B. Anderson (President), Theo Pauw (Chairman), H. Matthews (Vice-President), P. P. Peach (Vice-Chairman), W. P. Rowland (Director). Second row: C. M. Bassa, Dr W. Cohen, A. Gorschel, F. A. Peters, H. R. Lemmer (Education and Training), Dr L. J. Kriel (Health), R. L. Park. Third row: Z. M. Jacob, G. S. Scherbrucker, Miss H. Smith, C. Venter, J. G. Pelser, ds. A. M. Scheffler. Fourth row: J. Davis, Mrs H. C. MacCale, Mrs R. de Villiers, Miss E. M. Spurling, J. L. Badenhorst (National Education), F. J. de Jager (Indian Affairs), J. Kissoon Singh, P. M. Uys (Co-operation and Development), J. R. Solms. Fifth row: S. J. van der Walt, Mrs V. H. Pond, C. K. Lord, D. Erasmus, G. R. Hilton-Barber, Mrs R. Ruthven, M. P. Lewin, Miss L. Lünnow, G. R. Goliath.

## CHAPTER 1

### *THE INITIAL PHASE*

Several years before the founding of the South African National Council for the Blind in 1929 there were already stirrings in different parts of the country in connection with the rendering of special services to the blind. A realisation of the urgency of assisting this section of the community originated mainly with philanthropically minded individuals and groups. The religious community also played a role since its leaders strongly believed that service to the underprivileged was one of the most important duties of the Christian church. The persons who took the lead in these movements deserve praise for their pioneering work since they paved the way for the comprehensive system of services for the blind which we have today.

Historically the organisations which came into being as a result of this interest fall into two groups. The first group had already existed for a considerable time before the establishment of the National Council — one of them even in the previous century. The Worcester School for the Blind was founded in 1881, Our own Blind Fund Association in Natal in 1918 and the S.A. Library for the Blind in Grahamstown in 1919.

The second group came into being shortly before the foundation of the Council. They are the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind in 1926, the Athlone School for the Blind in 1927, the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society in 1928 and Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind also in 1928.

As regards the first group of organizations it should be noted that each rendered a service in a different sphere of activity. The first organization concerned itself with the education the child, the second with the provision of library services and the third with general care, the relief of distress and employment. Since each of these played a decisive role in its specific field, they deserve closer attention.



## The Worcester School for the Blind<sup>1</sup>

The Deaf and Blind Institute was founded in Worcester in 1881 and this was the beginning of the education of the blind in South Africa. The initial move in this connection had come from Ds Christiaan Rabie of Piketberg and Ds William Murray of Worcester – both ministers of the Cape Dutch Reformed Church.

In 1877 Ds Murray visited Ds Rabie who told him about a deaf boy in his congregation who did not receive any schooling. He was the only child of a wealthy farmer, Mr Theunis Smit. There was indeed a school for the deaf in Cape Town at that time under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church (founded in 1863), and Mr Smit thought of sending his son there. Ds Murray's reaction was to ask Ds Rabie to start a school for the deaf immediately at Piketberg under the management of the N.G. Church. Ds Rabie however considered Worcester to be a more suitable place as it was more centrally situated.<sup>2</sup>

More or less a year later a letter by Dr Andrew Murray, minister at Wellington (Cape) at the time, appeared in *Die Gereformeerde Kerkbode* of 16 March 1878 about "our deaf and dumb" in which he made mention of a father with two deaf sons. In the letter he advocated the founding of an institute for the education of deaf children under the auspices of the N.G. Church. The letter ends with the meaningful postscript:

"Dan zijn er noch onze blinden: dat iemand zich over hen ontferme en de gelegenheid stichte voor hunne opleiding."

(Then there are also our blind: that someone should have compassion upon them and create the opportunity for their education.)

It is likely that Dr Andrew Murray did not know about Ds William Murray's visit to Ds Rabie, or of their conversation. Without any doubt however, Dr Andrew Murray's letter in the *Kerkbode* and the favourable reaction it evoked from Dr Servaas Hofmeyr of Montagu, acted as a further stimulant for Di. Rabie and Murray to continue with their plans. It so happened that Ds Murray also had a deaf boy in his congregation, namely Piet de Labat, the son of Gert de Labat,<sup>3</sup> school principal at Rawsonville (Goudini) which fell under the parish of Worcester at that time.

In 1879 at a meeting of the Presbytery of Tulbagh (to which the parishes of Worcester and Piketberg then belonged) it was decided to

make provision for the education of the deaf. The Presbytery also committed itself to send a qualified teacher overseas to train as a teacher of the deaf.<sup>4</sup>

The needs of the blind were not discussed, according to the reports of the meeting of the Presbytery, but the case for the blind received the attention of a meeting of the Synod which was held in Cape Town the following year (1880). There it was decided to make provision for the education of both the deaf and the blind, through the founding of "The Deaf and Blind Institute". The resolution was passed at the Synod's meeting of 17 November 1880.<sup>5</sup>

A "Commission" was appointed to attend to the matter further and consisted of Di. W. Murray, C. Rabie, A. D. Luckhoff and G. A. Scholtz.

The problem of finding a suitable teacher for the institution now urgently required the attention of the Commission. At first they attempted to procure a teacher from Holland, but this effort fell through. The choice then fell on B. J. G. (Jan) de Labat, a young man who had just completed his teacher's course and was well known to Ds Murray. Furthermore, he was concerned about the education of the deaf, since he had a deaf brother (Piet). Part of De Labat's assignment was to orientate himself with the education of the blind as well.<sup>6</sup> In January 1880 De Labat left for Holland. It appears that although he devoted himself mainly to the study of the education of the deaf, he also carried out the charge he had received, namely to apply himself to the education of the blind as well. According to a report which was received from him in November 1880 from Amsterdam it appears that he resided at the Institute for the Blind in that city for some time to study the education of the blind. In connection with this he writes *inter alia* (translated): "I am happy to be able to say that I am fairly well acquainted with this branch of education."<sup>7</sup> After a sojourn of approximately fourteen months abroad De Labat returned on 10 March 1881. As regards the site where the institution should be established, it was decided that Worcester would be the most suitable place. The Synod, however, did not pass a resolution to this effect. Therefore the Commission, at its meeting on 4 May 1881, which was held at Worcester, decided that the institution should be established at Worcester. Biesenbach writes of this (translated): "It would certainly have been strange if the choice had fallen on a different place. Picketberg had in-

deed been mentioned, but it was at once pointed out that Worcester was much more central. Since 1876 Worcester was connected with Cape Town by rail and the extension of the railway to the north was already well underway in 1881.”<sup>8</sup>

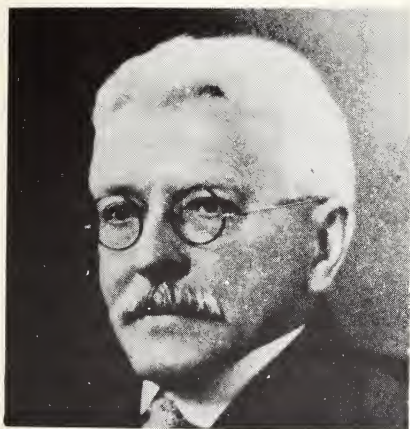
The Commission concerned itself immediately with the burning question of the raising of funds, for there was no hope of procuring any money from the education authorities, not before the school was founded and well under way.

As to who should be considered the founder of the Institution, it is today generally agreed that the honour should belong to Dr William Murray. In the *Souvenir* which was published during the 50th anniversary of the Institute he was honoured as such. A photograph of him also appeared in the publication. According to Dr Biesenbach, however, he ought to be considered a co-founder with Ds Christiaan Rabie. This was also the opinion of Rev. A. Dreyer, the first Archivist of the Cape N.G. Church, as recorded by Dr Biesenbach.<sup>9</sup>

The school was opened on 15 June 1881 in a hired room of an ordinary dwelling house in High Street, Worcester. Mr B. J. G. de Labat was the teacher. According to Biesenbach the school started with one pupil, but the *Souvenir* which was published in 1931 mentions three. All of them were deaf. About a month later the first blind pupil was enrolled. He was Daniël Simonis of Rawsonville, a village about 16 kilometres from Worcester. But he stayed only two months and then left because, according to the report of the Commission of the Institute to the N.G. Synod of 1883, as quoted by Biesenbach: “he lacked the courage and the inclination to stay longer.”<sup>10</sup>

Now that the Institute for the Deaf and Blind had officially been opened attention can henceforth be devoted to the department for the blind. After the discharge of the first blind pupil two months after his enrolment, a strange situation existed, namely that during the following ten years not a single blind child was admitted. The records of the Institute are very vague about the reason for this. Did the experience with the first blind pupil discourage the Commission and the teacher? Did De Labat prefer to apply himself to the education of the deaf because it was such a difficult task, and therefore did not see his way clear to teach a group of blind children as well? In connection with this Biesenbach wrote: “It is also likely that the predominant interest of the first principal in the deaf did not pave the way for the acceptance of





Mr M. J. Besselaar, Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind (1905-1928).



Dr P. E. Biesenbach, Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind (1929-1961).



Worcester School for the Blind. A group of the first pupils. In the centre is Issie Schoeman, the first pupil.



blind pupils during the first years of the Institution.”<sup>11</sup> From the testimony of four ex-pupils who were in residence at the school in 1891 and 1892, it appears that their parents either did not know of the existence of the school earlier, or were under the impression that blind children were not eligible. Whatever the reasons may have been, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that this was an unfortunate state of affairs, considering that there was a steady flow of pupils after 1891. Admittedly all of them were not “children”, for the ages of those admitted in 1891 and 1892 varied between 16 and 24 years. That there was a great need for education of the blind is proved by the fact that over a period of 15 years (1891 to 1905) 106 pupils were enrolled at the school, of whom 41 were still at school at the end of 1905.<sup>12</sup>

The first pupil who was admitted in 1891 was Isabella Schoeman of Oudtshoorn. She arrived in February of that year. The fact that ten years had elapsed between the first and second admissions, and considering that the first pupil was discharged after only two months, the question arises whether the date of the foundation of the school should be considered to be 1891 rather than 1881. In practice it should be 1891, because only then did the education programme begin in earnest. There existed some controversy about the dates but it is generally accepted that whereas the Institute for the Deaf and Blind was founded in 1881, this should also be the date of the establishment of the Worcester School for the Blind.

As the number of pupils grew in both departments (deaf and blind), it became necessary to appoint more staff. It also became clear, especially after the advent of the blind in 1891, that a division between the two departments would eventually become necessary.

The first male assistant teacher was appointed in one of the new posts in the department for the deaf. This was in 1886. As there were as yet no blind pupils, his duties were concerned with the deaf. However, later on he would play an important role in the teaching of the blind in South Africa. He was Mattheus Johannes (Jan) Besselaar.

Born in 1862 in Holland, the seventeen-year-old Besselaar came to South Africa with the assistance of his uncle, who lived at Stellenbosch. He first worked as a shop assistant in Cape Town, but wished to study further. Before he could begin, however, he received an invitation from Mr De Labat to visit him at Worcester. De Labat was acquainted with his parents in Holland and had met him there. After this visit Besselaar decided to become a teacher.

He enrolled as a student at the Normal College in Cape Town for both the matriculation examination and the "Middle Class Teachers' Certificate". He passed the latter in June 1886, but he failed one subject (Latin) for the matriculation examination. This he passed later.

Already in 1885 De Labat had spoken to him about a possible appointment, and towards the end of the year the post was offered to him in writing by the Board of Management of the Institute. He began his task in the department for the deaf on 21 July 1886. The salary was £75 (R150) per year with free board and lodging. He wrote to his parents that he was quite satisfied with this.

In 1887 he was promoted to first assistant — a proof of satisfaction with his work. From June to December 1890 he was granted leave to go to Europe (Holland, Germany and England) to study the teaching of the deaf. Although this was his main object, he mentioned in a letter that he also included the education of the blind in his studies.

It is strange that Besselaar's chief assignment was the study of the education of the deaf and that the education of the blind was a secondary consideration. In connection with this Biesenbach writes (translated): "After his return from Europe in April 1891 Besselaar at first taught both the deaf and the blind. It soon came about that De Labat alone took charge of the education of the deaf and Besselaar of that of the blind."<sup>13</sup>

As the two departments expanded it was inevitable that this would result in the establishment of two separate schools, one for the blind and the other for the deaf, each with its own principal and administration. This happened in 1905. Geographically there was no separation, however, as both schools were situated on the same terrain. The geographical separation finally took place only in 1932, when the school for the deaf was moved to its new buildings on a site on the outskirts of the town. The result was that enough space for the school for the blind was now available, especially for the building of hostels, and for the erection of a new school building, which was completed in 1938. This paved the way for the introduction of a matriculation course in 1943, which again led to the admission to universities with all the attendant benefits.

Up to now attention has been given mainly to the history and founding of the Worcester School for the Blind and its academic development. We must now examine the efforts which were made to introduce vocational training. It took the form of handwork and trade

courses in the educational programme of the school. This must be seen as the beginning of training for employment of the blind in South Africa, either in sheltered employment or in open labour.

Wherever schools for the blind had been founded for the first time, such as in France (1784), Austria (1804), Germany (1806) and America (1832), it was soon realised that academic teaching alone was not sufficient, and very soon vocational training courses were introduced, which could possibly lead to independent living. With some it became a matter of such urgency that even a man like Valentin Haüy, head of the first school, incurred criticism because he introduced too many trades, which resulted in the training becoming too superficial. He also devoted much attention to the teaching of music. Up to a certain point this met with a measure of success, for quite a number of his ex-pupils were employed as organists in churches, but the school turned out so many that later on several of them were unable to find employment. In Vienna, Berlin and Boston the principals of the various schools were in time forced to start workshops, because the trained pupils were unable to obtain work in the open labour market or to do profitable work on their own. As regards the first American school for the blind, namely the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston (established in 1832), the first principal, Dr Samuel Gridley Howe, was positive – with a slightly exaggerated optimism – that all his ex-pupils could be economically integrated. He also mentioned, amongst other things, that there were good careers for intellectual blind people in the music world. However, the entire question of employment worried him so much later on that he established a workshop for adult blind as a department of his school. Ten years later the workshop was separated from the school<sup>14</sup> Howe realised that a school had its own objectives and had to remain solely a school. In England the position was more or less the same. The second school for the blind in England, founded in 1793, was named “The Bristol Asylum<sup>15</sup> or Industrial School for the Blind”. The last part of the name indicated that handicrafts definitely formed part of the educational programme. But according to French<sup>16</sup> it did not always lead to employment. He states it thus:

“At Bristol in the same year there was founded an Asylum or Industrial School for the Blind, its object being not to employ the blind after being educated, but to teach them the means of getting a living by work”. This objective appeared to be far too optimistic, according to the experience of Dr Thomas Armitage, undoubtedly the most remark-



able blind man England ever produced. When he, as a medical doctor, had to relinquish his profession in 1860 at the age of 36 years on account of progressive blindness, he decided to devote himself with heart and soul to the service of his fellow blind. He was a man with drive and perseverance. He established, inter alia, the British and Foreign Blind Association in 1868, which is known today as the Royal National Institute for the Blind, with its head office in London.

To return to the Worcester School for the Blind, we find that shortly after the admission of pupils in 1891 the Board of Management decided to enlist two teachers from abroad — one as a music teacher and the other as an instructor in basket making. The music teacher was an ex-pupil of the Royal Normal College for the Blind, London, which Thomas Armitage had founded in 1872. He was Mr Harold Greenwood, who arrived here in January 1894. The instructor in basket making was Mr G. Paterson. He came from the Edinburgh Asylum for the Blind, of which Mr W. H. Illingworth, a well-known personality in the education of the blind in Scotland, was the headmaster. Mr Paterson assumed his duties in October 1894.<sup>17</sup>

With the teaching of music there was immediate success. Mr Greenwood was a capable and conscientious teacher and enjoyed the respect of his pupils.

It is fitting to quote the words of the late Mr P. Cruse (music teacher in Pretoria), one of his most successful ex-pupils, on the occasion of Mr Greenwood's retirement in 1933. "Mr Greenwood has taught us three things: first to appreciate music, which is a great thing in these days of mechanised music. Secondly, he developed our critical faculties, which enabled us to maintain a high musical standard. Lastly, he taught us to realise that our musical training must become our means of livelihood."

Music was thus the first profession practised by blind people in South Africa. However, there were no outstanding performers. Those best qualified became music teachers, and generally also became the organists of the churches in the towns in which they worked.

The fact that, almost without exception, the blind music teachers acquitted themselves well of their tasks and became esteemed members of the various communities in which they worked, shows, besides other benefits, the rehabilitative value of profitable employment. It also proves that in spite of the so-called isolation in which the pupils of a residential school for the blind live and receive their education, a basic

foundation is laid for their integration into the community when they leave school.

Another course which showed good results was that of piano tuning. Mr Greenwood had taken a course in this in England along with his musical studies (which was the policy of the Royal Normal College at that time). Although it was not his chief concern, he trained several students successfully. The first blind person who left the Worcester School for the Blind as a piano tuner was Mr J. J. (Koot) Pienaar. The piano tuning department was later taken over by Mr F. Verster, vocational instructor. He was trained in his free time by Mr Greenwood and Mr Pienaar who worked in Worcester. Biesenbach writes about this: "Thus he (Verster) breathed new life into this very important subject after it had not been taught for years. Piano tuning immediately became popular with the pupils; so much so that Verster had no fewer than 16 piano tuning candidates in one year."<sup>18</sup>

Piano tuning has through the years been an excellent source of income for quite a number of blind people, especially those with business acumen and initiative, together with their professional knowledge. A few have opened music shops, others have acquired agencies for the sale of pianos and organs, while a number have obtained contracts from provincial administrations for the tuning and repairing of school pianos. Here then is a group of blind people who have carved out a career for themselves on their own initiative.

Another avenue of employment which had already been introduced in 1914 was stenography. This was the outcome of the instruction in typewriting, which had been taught at the school since 1907,<sup>19</sup> and proves that from early on it had already been realised that typewriting should play an important part in the school programme. The authorities realised the necessity of typewriting, not only as an aid to teaching, but also as a rehabilitation medium, since it is a useful means of communication with the sighted community.

It stands to reason that only those pupils who showed ability in typewriting were chosen to follow the course in stenography.

Biesenbach writes about this: "In 1914 three braille shorthand machines were ordered from Berlin and a beginning was made with the teaching of braille stenography to a few of the most competent pupils. They took down the dictated letter in braille shorthand, and then typed it over on an ordinary typewriter."<sup>20</sup>

The braille shorthand of which Biesenbach writes was a system de-

vised in those days for the Dutch language and used in Holland. Copies of this system were still found at the Worcester School for the Blind during the forties, when the Afrikaans braille shorthand system was devised. We must therefore accept that the pupils used the Dutch system in those days and received their instruction in that language. It is possible that the English braille shorthand system was also taught at that time.

Although the effort of the Worcester school shows a spirit of enterprise and was certainly praiseworthy it was soon abandoned. Biesenbach mentions that Besselaar had told him that no employer could be found to take trained students into service. "One of the most efficient pupils in stenography and typewriting — Susanna Malan — actually offered to work without payment for a trial period in order to be given an opportunity to prove her capability. Even for this no employer was available."<sup>21</sup>

During those years it was perhaps still too early to expect employers (private or even the State) to be at all willing to employ a blind typist or stenographer. This assertion is made in the light of the fact that even in the sixties the present writer was urgently asked to supply a provincial administration with advice as to the type of work which could be given to two blind typists.

After this abortive effort of 1914 nothing was done in regard to the training of stenographers at the school until after the institution of the matriculation course in 1943. Then one of the candidates who had passed (Johanna Erwee) was trained as a stenographer typist. Provision for such a course had already been made, as the vice-principal of the school at that time had already in 1940 started devising a braille shorthand system for Afrikaans. The candidate was instructed in braille shorthand in both official languages. After having completed her training she was appointed at the Worcester School and later occupied a post in the public service, and indeed as the typist of a cabinet minister.

We now return to the establishment of a vocational training department in the school. This must be seen as an important development because for many years vocational training would form the backbone of a reasonably profitable field of labour for the largest group of blind people after they had left the school. It is also the foundation on which the present factory for the blind at Worcester has been built (although through the years it has developed and grown out of all recognition).



Before Mr Paterson's arrival in 1894 a beginning had already been made with instruction in basket making. This was the only form of handwork that was taught initially. It was, however, considered important because there was a very great demand for bushel baskets in the grape growing districts of the Western Cape.

Biesenbach quotes from a letter from Ds W. Murray to the then Superintendent-General of Education (S.G.E.) of the Cape Education Department, in which he set out the arrangements that had been made for the teaching of basket making. These were as follows: two young men would travel by train from Robertson to Worcester on Thursdays in order to instruct eight pupils on Fridays at the remuneration of three shillings and nine pence (approximately 37 cents) a day.

In connection with this Biesenbach mentions that Mr F. Verster had told him that afterwards only one person had come from Robertson, and his conveyance was a donkey cart!

That cane was used in those days is shown in a report by Mr H. Hill, principal of the Boys' School at Worcester at the time, who had to report to Ds Murray on the instruction in the vocational department. This was during the time when the weekly visits of the two "instructors" from Robertson took place. Hill's reports on the quality of the work were favourable, and he mentions *inter alia*: "The material used was strips of reed, quince twigs and cane."<sup>22</sup>

Still, it seems as if both the Department of Education and the Board of Management did not fully realise the seriousness of the matter, for at the beginning of 1895 Mr Paterson was appointed as a class teacher in the place of a teacher who had left. This meant that Paterson then had only 1½ hours per week in which to give instruction in basket making. Yet it would appear that the Department of Education was more to blame for this state of affairs than the Board, considering that the former insisted that a qualified teacher should be appointed in the vacancy. The Board of Management then probably came up against a difficult decision. Whatever the case may have been, the fact remains that the vocational training department suffered a grave setback.

Biesenbach was critical towards the attitude of the Board in this matter, and compared the favourable attention that the music department enjoyed with the shabby treatment with which the trades department had to be satisfied.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the comparison was unjust because the nature of the instruction and the ultimate objectives were so widely different. Biesenbach is, however, correct when he writes: "Concern-



ing the necessity for vocational training, the Board could not have been in the dark. Both De Labat and Besselaar had become acquainted with a number of schools in Europe where the making of baskets, brushes, mats and nets, and spinning, weaving, knitting, and the caning of chairs received much attention.<sup>24</sup>

In connection with the girls Biesenbach writes as follows: "With the vocational training of the girls matters were even worse. In this period no instructress was appointed to take charge of this important work. A beginning was first made when Mrs H. Greenwood gave classes in knitting to the girls for two hours a week in 1895. For this charitable work she merely received a bonus of £10 now and again. She continued up to 1906."<sup>25</sup>

After that date a temporary teacher was appointed to teach hand-work to the girls as well as other subjects. This, however, was a rather haphazard arrangement, and only in 1910 was the department placed on a firm footing under the control of Mrs Pederson.<sup>26</sup>

A reasonable breakthrough as regards the mechanisation of knitting came after the return of Mr J. P. Kruger, a blind teacher at the school, who had visited Europe in 1905. There he became acquainted with the circular knitting machine for the making of socks. He brought one machine back with him. In the beginning he operated it himself and also taught the girls and teachers to use it. This was the beginning of an important era in the employment of blind girls, although the knitting of socks later on ceased to be profitable as a result of the unequal competition with the factories.

To return to the vocational training of the boys, it may be mentioned that this only became properly established under the guidance of Mr F. J. (Frank) Verster, who, however, found it an uphill struggle on account of the minimal help he received.

Verster was enrolled as a pupil in 1892 at the age of 17 years. He first attended an ordinary school up to standard four, as he became blind only after an attack of meningitis when he was 13 years old. He was a bright pupil and passed the standard six examination at the end of the following year, namely in 1893. In June 1894 he passed the "Elementary examination" of that time. Vocational training had then already been introduced at the school. In 1895 Verster was appointed by the Board of Management as an instructor in the making of baskets, but the S.G.E. of the Cape Department of Education refused to approve the appointment, and towards the end of 1895 Verster left the school.

It was probably his intention to become thoroughly proficient in the making of baskets, and then to start his own business. In connection with this Biesenbach mentions<sup>27</sup> that Verster went to two blind brothers — Loubsters — who lived in the vicinity of Hermon (between Tulbagh and Wellington). They made bushel baskets. His visit was met with unfriendliness and after this unsuccessful mission he returned home to his parents.

It is interesting to note that the blind had already made a living on their own initiative so long ago. Unfortunately we do not know anything further about the Loubsters. They were never pupils of the Worcester School, and must have learnt their trade somewhere else.

Verster then left for Cape Town. The Malays at the time were renowned for their cane work and he pleaded with them to teach him the making of baskets. At first they were unwilling and he had to pay them to let him into the secrets of the trade.

After he had worked for four months among the Malays and had made good progress, he went back to the school, well equipped to accept the Board of Management's offer of appointment as an instructor in the making of baskets on a year's probation. That was in June 1896.

His duties did not, however, end with the making of baskets. It has already been mentioned that he also became an instructor in piano tuning. After that the making of mattresses followed. Verster learnt this trade on his own initiative from an upholsterer who worked for his brother, a wagon maker in Paarl. Always on the lookout for new avenues, he went to a Reformatory in Cape Town to learn the making of rope matting. That was in 1907. This trade was not a success because it took too much time to do it by hand, and weaving had not yet been introduced.<sup>28</sup>

Frank Verster can be regarded as the real pioneer of vocational training for the blind in this country. Not only did he make good craftsmen of his pupils but he also encouraged them to use their own initiative in order to become self-supporting. In this he set them an example. Until 1930 he was the only instructor in charge of all the trades at the school, and was burdened with a very heavy responsibility. Yet he was successful in the training of his pupils, and prepared them well for their task.

The problem which soon arose was how to provide employment for the trained school-leavers. But this was not a situation unique to South Africa. In all the countries of Europe as well as in America, where

schools were established for the first time the problem of employment arose. It was as if everybody was so concerned with making the education of the blind child a success, and was so intensely involved with the countless problems which this produced, that any thought of what would happen to the child afterwards remained in the background. At first the solution lay chiefly in the establishment of sheltered workshops. There were a few school-leavers who could make a living as music teachers or piano tuners, but they formed only a small percentage. Those who were trained in the trades such as basket making and other cane work, or the making of brushes, brooms, etc. could not make a decent living.

Here in South Africa the example of Europe was not followed at first, and no sheltered workshops were established towards the end of the last century or even up to the end of the first quarter of this century (1926).

The policy of the Worcester Institute was that trained ex-pupils of the school should make their own way in the labour world. The Institute was founded solely for the education of blind and deaf pupils. The policy is clearly set out in a brochure which was published by the Board of Management in 1914, and in which the following very definite statement occurs: "The Institute is no institution for the lifelong care of unfortunates and is no society for the employment of the blind!"<sup>29</sup> The brochure states further: "The chief aim is to make it possible for the pupils to help with their own support and to reach a certain degree of independence." The help which is mentioned here would certainly have existed only in the training which they had received at the school.

These statements were made in spite of the following point of view of the principal of the school, as expressed in a report to the Cape Department of Education two years before (August 1912):

"Many other gratifying results could be recorded, but there are those who fail in the battle of life. An association for the employment of the blind is becoming an urgent necessity, to continue the work of the school among the adults who are in need of such help."<sup>30</sup>

One must accept, then, that the principal did actually realise what straits these people were in, but for some reason or other did not have the energy, or could not influence the Board of Management, to launch a vast undertaking such as the erection of workshops with



boarding facilities included. It is likely that the Board of Management considered that some other body should start such a project, but at that time no such association came forward. Everything concerning the blind was concentrated in the School for the Blind.

That the matter had already occupied the attention of the Board of Management years before, is proved by a remark in a report of the Board to the Synod in 1903, which reads as follows:

“Large orders for baskets must often be refused because no provision exists for the housing of blind workers, who must live away from the Institute. Such an employment centre would provide the indigent blind with a livelihood and can possibly be expanded.”<sup>31</sup>

In connection with the position of school-leavers one should refer to the report of the Board of Management to the Synod in 1919. The period covered was the previous four years, as the Synod sat every four years. The section in the report dealing with this matter reads as follows: (translated)

“Of the 48 blind pupils who left the school during this period, two have died, five were discharged on medical advice on account of ill health, and four because of weak mental faculties. Seven returned to their parental homes after not having given full satisfaction. Four hold positions as organists and music teachers. Eleven left to become piano tuners. Nine work as basket makers and mattress makers, and five girls work as the makers of socks on the knitting machine.”<sup>32</sup>

If one analyses the above, one is struck by the large number of piano tuners who left the school, namely eleven. This must be compared with the nine basket and mattress makers. It is to be regretted that no investigation was carried out to ascertain where the piano tuners had settled and how they had fared. This of course also applies to the others.

In connection with the report on the school-leavers and their ability to obtain work, Biesenbach's reaction is as follows:

“The impression is left that circumstances were fairly favourable for these pupils in their struggle to make a living. It will later be shown to what a small degree this optimism was justified, and that it was probably based on the misjudgement of the real position, or an absence of correct information.”<sup>33</sup>

Biesenbach here refers to a survey which he made in 1929, shortly after he had been appointed principal of the school, following the retirement of Mr Besselaar. The survey was in connection with the finan-

cial position of the school's ex-pupils. Biesenbach had realised that after-care work, amongst other things, in the form of sheltered workshops for both men and women, had long since become an absolute necessity. It had to be an expansion of the activities of the Institute, and such an organization had to fall under the direct administration of the Board of Management. A circular was consequently sent by Biesenbach to all the ex-pupils of whom the addresses could be found. "About a hundred supplied the required information, from which it transpired that only two girls could support themselves, and that more than half of the men could not even earn one pound (R2) a month. If we take into account that the circular doubtlessly reached all the more successful ex-pupils, and was answered by them, and that many a struggling and needy ex-pupil could not be contacted, then these data speak a very clear language."<sup>34</sup>

The workshops were opened on 1 May 1933. This aspect of the work will be dealt with when attention is given to the growth of after-care work in South Africa in the period after the establishment of the S.A. National Council for the Blind in 1929.

It is, however, necessary to point out that in the decades before 1929 there were quite a number of blind people who had been very successful. Besides music teachers and piano tuners there were also a few physiotherapists who had then already completed their courses in London and had begun their own practices. There were even those who had made a big success of basket making. Amongst them were the Marais brothers of Worcester, who had built up a flourishing business. They used Coloured men as factory workers. Later on they acquired a pipe factory and a motor workshop. There were several basket makers in the Western Cape who made a good living on their own as the makers of bushel baskets, for which there was of course a good demand in the area. In those days there were also, just as today, an exceptional case here and there where a blind person followed a vocation not generally associated with blindness. So there was Mr C. Marais, a cousin of the Marais brothers of Worcester who had set up an electrical business at Robertson.<sup>35</sup>

The arrival of Mr (later Dr) Biesenbach as principal of the School for the Blind in 1929 brought about a complete change in the approach to employment for the blind. This must be partially ascribed to the extensive study of the education of the blind and blindness in general that he undertook abroad in 1928; but perhaps it was mostly due to his anx-

iety about the lot of most of the school-leavers who were leading a very meagre existence. Biesenbach was a very practical person by nature and a good administrator, who believed in the cause which he served. These qualities sometimes brought him into conflict with the authorities, but this did not trouble him unduly, since the cause of the blind was his main concern.

In his thesis (often quoted before) he was not always as impartial in his treatment of the history of the school as should be expected of a historian. He was very critical of the views of the Board of Management, and perhaps more so of those of his predecessor because the latter did not concern himself much with the lot of his ex-pupils, and considered education alone important.

Biesenbach accomplished a great task at Worcester, and his name must be honoured for this. The role which he played will receive more attention at a later stage when the activities of the various affiliated bodies are dealt with.

We have tried to show how an educational system for the blind could lead up to the broad conception of the provision of services. Special attention has been paid to the period before 1929 because, as has already been shown, that was an important year in the history of blindness. It is the year in which the foundation of the S.A. National Council for the Blind occurred, but it is incidentally also the year when a great change in the viewpoint concerning the education of the blind took place. Later on it will be shown that the development of education still further contributed to a better and more effective provision of services to the blind of the country.

### **Our Own Blind Fund Association**

According to available information,<sup>36</sup> John Edward Palmer was so moved by the lot of the large number of blinded soldiers towards the end of the First World War (1914-1918) that he decided to start a fund for their financial assistance. As part of his effort he placed collection boxes in offices in Durban, and organised concerts and other functions in country towns. When the fund had become reasonably strong, he decided to form a committee to administer it. In this way "Our Own Blind Fund Association for the Province of Natal" was brought into existence on 30 August 1918.<sup>37</sup>

Palmer's vocation was stated as being that of a Commissioner of Oaths, with an office in Castle Arcade, West Street, Durban. It is prob-





Our Own Blind Fund Association of Natal. In the centre: Mr J. Edward Palmer (founder) with white helmet, Mrs Constance Cawston and Dr Gordon Cawston (her husband), with a group of blind people, 1921.



On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of the oldest society for adult blind, namely the Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association. Mr R. L. Park, Chairman, addresses a gathering at a function held on 12 July 1978.

able that he practised law. It has also been said that he often entertained groups of blind people at his home where, besides taking part in other forms of recreation, they sometimes passed the time by making music.

The fund was initially utilized to grant financial aid to blind people. These included the civilian blind as well as the war-blinded. A fund for the establishment of a national institute for the blind was also started. A project which can be considered unique was the opening of a shop for shoe repairs. In this connection the 1961 Chairman's report of the Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association<sup>38</sup> states the following:

"As early as 1919 the need for a Home and Training Institution in or near Durban was recognised, and as a step in this direction a boot repairing shop at the corner of Musgrave and St. Thomas Roads was opened during July 1920, but later abandoned at the end of April 1928. In 1937 a property situated in First Avenue, Greyville, was purchased but the cost of alterations to make the property suitable for a workshop was considered too high, and once again the scheme was abandoned."

Nevertheless, another workshop was opened a year later, in 1938, after the services of an instructor from England had been procured.

About the year 1921 a lady who was destined to play an important role in welfare work for the blind of all population groups joined the Association. She was Mrs Gordon (Constance) Cawston. Having lived in Transkei, where her husband practised as a medical doctor, she had full command of both the Xhosa and the Zulu languages. This facilitated her welfare work among the Zulu blind. She was a tireless worker, who later became the driving force behind the establishment of the Society for Bantu Blind in 1936 and the Natal Indian Society for the Blind in 1939. Later she also played an important part in the activities of the National Council, serving for some time as its vice-chairman.

The name of Our Own Blind Fund Association appears in the records of the National Council for the first time in connection with a conference which was held at Bloemfontein on 22 June 1928. It was convened by Miss J. E. Wood of the S.A. Library for the Blind and the Rev. A. W. Blaxall, a minister of the Anglican Church, with the object of establishing a national body for the benefit of the blind in this country. All bodies and persons who were concerned with work



among the blind were invited, among them also the Natal Association. The latter, however, did not send a representative. At the conference Mrs G. K. Nowlan of Johannesburg reported on the work which was being done by the Association. Besides other matters, she made mention of a sum of £5 000 (R10 000) which they had on fixed deposit with the object of establishing a permanent institution.

When it was decided to hold a continuation conference in Cape Town to finalise the establishment of a national co-ordinating body, and invitations had been sent out on a much wider front, the Natal Association once more declined to send representatives. On inquiry the Association replied that it had decided not to affiliate to the Council. It is possible that the Association was under the impression that the money which it had collected up to that time would be incorporated into the funds of the National Council.<sup>39</sup>

Several attempts were made, initially by the Organising Secretary of the National Council and later by the Chairman, Adv. A. W. Bowen, to change its attitude, but the Association refused to be convinced. It was explained that each affiliated society was autonomous and would retain all its assets. After lengthy negotiations the obstacles were removed and the Association eventually affiliated to the National Council on 14 September 1936.<sup>40</sup>

In 1942 the Association changed its name to the Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association. As has already been stated, separate societies for Blacks (1936) and Indians (1939) were started by Mrs Cawston, who was a very active member of the Association at that time. It can therefore rightly be assumed that three active organizations evolved from the original "Our Own Blind Fund Association" of 1918. Thus the founding of the Association was fully justified, and tribute should be paid to John Edward Palmer for his efforts.

### **The South African Library for the Blind**

The South African Library for the Blind owes its existence to the incidental meeting between Miss Josephine Ethel Wood and Miss Eleanor Comber during the influenza epidemic of 1918. Both ladies were engaged in caring for the sick in the Black residential areas of Grahams-town. Miss Comber was a missionary who had come from England in 1914 where she had been doing welfare work among the blind. She intended to carry on with her work in this country mainly on a religious basis, but found that there were no books for those blind persons who



A historic photograph of Miss Josie Wood taken in 1925 in front of the S.A. Library for the Blind, Grahamstown.



S.A. Library for the Blind – department for talking books on discs (before the advent of tapes), 1961.

had left school.<sup>41</sup> She then obtained books in braille and Moon-type from friends overseas. Towards the end of 1918 she was in contact with about 25 blind persons, and 15 of them received books regularly. By this time she had built up the nucleus of a library. It consisted of 100 volumes. In 1919 Miss Comber decided to return to England and she prevailed upon Miss Wood to take over the work. In this connection Miss Wood writes as follows:

“In the beginning of 1919 she gave me some instruction in braille, the books, one dozen canvas covers in which to pack them for posting, and the care of 18 readers. I was rather reluctant to undertake the work, but have never since regretted it.”

In March 1919 the library was started in the home of Miss Wood, “without funds and without shelves”. Very soon friends and pupils of her old school in Grahamstown sent small sums of money with which she could buy braille books. Readers sent some of their own books. Donations came from the most unlikely places: England, China, Tulbagh, Van Rhynsdorp, and others.

In 1921 she made contact with the two English institutions, namely the National Institute for the Blind and the National Library for the Blind in London. The N.I.B. sent a case containing 166 volumes as a gift, and the Union Castle Company conveyed it free of charge on one of its ships. The National Library for the Blind also regularly lent 40 volumes for six months at a time. The result of all these efforts was that towards the year 1923 the library possessed 900 books (in braille and Moon) and 150 on loan. In that year the first grant to be allotted by the authorities, namely £100 (R200), was received from the Cape Provincial council.

It is understandable that Miss Wood could not, as a result of the expansion of the services, cope with the situation on her own, and needed help. In this connection she writes briefly and succinctly:

“In 1921 Miss Krause came to help and stayed 28 years.”<sup>42</sup>

A few years later Miss Blackwell joined them and became the braille expert. She trained numerous persons to transcribe books into braille. This transcription service was to become an important source for the augmentation of the supply of books.

Miss Wood realized that she could not continue with the organization on her own and gathered together a small group of people in December 1923 to form a committee. During the following year a trust deed was drawn up and a Board of Management, consisting of nom-



inees from various public bodies in Grahamstown, was established. The first chairman was Mr M. E. Godlonton, who served in this capacity from 1924 to 1942. The Governor-General at that time agreed to act as Patron-in-Chief. The first meeting of the Board of Management of the S.A. Library for the Blind took place on 7 July 1924. The Board took over the control of the library, with Miss J. E. Wood acting as both librarian and secretary.

In the same year the Library received a legacy from the Bannerman Estate which enabled the Board of Management to buy an old building in High Street which they could convert into a library. The Library is still housed in this building at the present day, but with some extensions added over the years.

In August 1925 Adv. R. W. Bowen of Cape Town officially opened the building, which from then on was known as Bannerman House. In the course of his address he said:

“This little ceremony marks a very decided epoch in the history of the blind in South Africa as it is the first occasion that can be claimed as a national movement.”<sup>43</sup>

By this time the number of readers had increased to 150, and the books to 2 000.

The Board of Management had no intention of allowing the Library to remain isolated, and set itself the task of making contact with library organizations in the country. Consequently Professor Bodmer, a member of the Board, and Miss J.E. Wood attended a conference of the S.A. Library Association in 1928 in Bloemfontein. The Carnegie Corporation<sup>44</sup> was also represented.

A strong plea for financial assistance by Professor Bodmer was sympathetically received, and in 1930 a grant of £1 200 (R2 400) was made by the Corporation. A few years later this was followed by a second grant.

Since we are dealing with the initial phase of services to the blind in this chapter, i.e. up to the year 1929 when the S.A. National Council for the Blind was established, the history of the S.A. Library for the Blind will now be discontinued for the time being. The subsequent activities and influence of this important institution will receive further attention in a later chapter.

### **Johannesburg Society for Civilian Blind**

After Miss J. E. Wood had delivered a radio talk on the S.A. Library for





Society for Help Civilian Blind, Johannesburg. Opening of the "Blind Workers' Institute" in May 1940 by the Rt Hon. W. B. Madeley, Minister of Labour. From left: Mr Madeley, a worker, Mrs G. K. Nowlan, Mr T. A. M. Huddle, Mayor of Johannesburg, Miss A. May Rogers. (Origin of photograph unknown).



Workshop of the Johannesburg Society in Anderson Street before moving to Roseacre.

the Blind on 13 January 1925, she was requested to address a meeting of the National Council of Women of Johannesburg.<sup>45</sup> On this occasion she gave a general outline of matters pertaining to blindness and laid particular stress on the dire circumstances in which many blind people found themselves. Among those present was Mrs G. K. (Dorothy) Nowlan who was deeply moved by the prevailing conditions. She immediately set to work to form a committee with four friends to commence welfare work among the blind in Johannesburg. They hired an office where blind home-workers could bring their products every Friday, and from where these could then be sold. This was in 1926.<sup>46</sup>

It became clear that there was a need for a workshop for the blind where, amongst other things, they could receive training. With this in view a fund-raising campaign was set in motion. In connection with this, the following appears in the Society's Jubilee publication (1926-1976):

“To publicise the work the Voluntary Committee organised a stall at the Witwatersrand Agricultural Show at which a few blind workers demonstrated their skills. As a result of this publicity, and the donations received, the first ‘workshop’ was rented in an old garage on the corner of Leyds and Biccard Streets, Braamfontein.”

This arrangement proved to be unsatisfactory later on, and in 1932 a building, situated at the corner of Sauer and Frederick Streets, Johannesburg, was bought. These premises could accommodate both the workshop and the offices. A room was also fitted out for the display of finished articles. At this stage, however, we have already arrived at the period after the establishment of the National Council in 1929. The rest of the Society's history will be dealt with later.

In addition to the pioneering work undertaken by Mrs Nowlan in Johannesburg, she played an important part in the foundation of the National Council. At both conferences which were held for this purpose — in Bloemfontein in 1928 and in Cape Town in 1929<sup>47</sup> — she actively assisted in shaping and giving direction to the new co-ordinating body which was to be established. In connection with this it is significant that she took an active part in the discussions during the drawing up of the constitution of the Council, to which she made a constructive contribution. According to the minutes and other documents she introduced several matters for discussion, such as compulsory education, prevention of blindness, the procuring and training of



instructors and the appointment of home-teachers. This showed that she had a thorough insight into matters relating to blindness in general. She was elected as a member of the Executive Committee at the foundation meeting of the Council, which took place on 20 March 1929.

### **The Athlone School for the Blind**

Another organization for service to the blind which was founded before the establishment of the S.A. National Council for the Blind was the Athlone School for the Blind. The school was officially opened by the Governor-General, the Earl of Athlone, on 7 May 1927.

Although the preparatory work for its establishment was actually begun in 1926, there were stirrings as early as 1924. In that year two blind Coloured children were found on the Cape Flats by a Mrs Grippin of the Society for the Protection of Child Life. It so happened that she was familiar with braille, as she had previously transcribed books into braille for the National Library for the Blind in London. She immediately set to work to teach the children to read and write.<sup>48</sup> A year later, in 1925, the Rev. A. W. Blaxall, Anglican Minister of Maitland, Cape Town, in the course of his pastoral work, came across a blind boy named Tommy Heuvel who wished to attend school. After that Mr Blaxall was informed of another blind child by the Child Life Protection Society.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, knowing of four blind Coloured children, Mr Blaxall immediately called on Adv. R. W. Bowen to discuss the possibility of education for the Coloured blind. Following on this, contact was made with other interested persons and as a result a public meeting was held in Cape Town on 20 July 1926. With regard to the further course of events we quote the following from the fiftieth annual report of the Athlone School (1976-1977):

“From this meeting came a committee which elected an executive and thereafter the work progressed apace; funds were collected, a loan was raised and a house at Athlone<sup>50</sup> was purchased to be the first home of the school. A superintendent, Mr S. H. Lawrence, was appointed to attend to the administrative work and his wife, an experienced teacher of the blind, undertook the educational duties. The first school day was Monday, 2nd May 1927, and the register contained six names.”

It is interesting to note that the seventh name on the register, entered

on 19 May 1927, was that of Isaac John Jacobs, who later played an important part in connection with the provision of services to the blind, and was a foundation member of the League of Friends of the Blind.

On account of the special interest shown in the school by the Earl of Athlone, Governor-General of the then Union of South Africa, it was named after him. An announcement to this effect was made at the official opening ceremony.

The full name of the institution was the Athlone School and Workshops for Coloured Blind Association.<sup>51</sup> The primary objective as to provide for the educational needs of Coloured blind children. On account of the lack of facilities elsewhere, Indian and Black children were for many years admitted to the Athlone School. Post-school training in certain trades was also envisaged.

As the number of pupils increased the accommodation became inadequate, and it was planned to enlarge the building. However, at that same time the buildings of St Raphael, a church organization at Faure,<sup>52</sup> became available and in June 1928 the school moved to these premises. Conditions were not exactly suitable for a school, but there was enough space and the school was housed in these buildings from 1928 until 1941. In that year the move to the present modern building complex in Bellville South took place.

A person who enthusiastically applied herself to the task of helping to establish the school was Miss Mary Helen Currey.<sup>53</sup> She was the first treasurer of the School Committee, and in later years the Vice-Chairman until her death in 1958.

In the Chairman's report of 1929 special reference was also made, amongst other things, to the expansion of the trades department. A trades instructor in the person of Mr P. R. Botha, who had received his training at the Worcester School for the Blind, had been appointed. In connection with the work done, the chairman mentioned that bushel baskets were produced for use on the wine farms in the vicinity, for which there was a great demand. There was also a special type of basket designed and made for the De Beers Company, for use in their factory at Somerset West.

This part of the early history of the Athlone School for the Blind is concluded at this point, since this section merely deals with the history of the services to the blind during the period before the foundation of the S.A. National Council for the Blind in 1929. The rest of the history



of the school will be dealt with in due course, by virtue of the fact that it played such an important role in the development of the promotion of services to the blind in this country. It should also be mentioned here that various persons who were actively concerned with the Athlone School played a prominent part in the S.A. National Council for the Blind. Adv. R. W. Bowen, chairman of the School Committee for many years, was also the first chairman of the Council, and acted in that capacity until his death in 1948. Rev. A. W. Blaxall as well as Mr Marlow, later principal of the school, were also leading figures in the Council for many years. These persons who have long since passed away, must be honoured for their service to the education of the Coloured blind in our country.

We conclude with a tribute paid to the founders as recorded in the fiftieth annual report of the school:

“ . . . But it is equally clear that from the outset there were three persons who from the prominence of the role they played and the lead they gave were in a category by themselves. It is these three who down the years have been honoured as the founders of our school and whom we specially remember each Founders' Day:  
Advocate Robert Walter Bowen  
The Rev. Dr. Arthur W. Blaxall  
Miss Mary Helen Currey.”

### Other organizations

During the foundation period of the Council in 1928 and 1929 quite a number of organizations commenced their activities. The usual procedure was to form a committee and then to open a depot where blind home-workers could bring their products to be sold. After that efforts followed to set up a workshop.

The societies which were established during this period were the following:

Pretoria Society to Help Civilian Blind  
Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind (Civilian)  
Cape Town Civilian Blind Society  
Civilian Blind Society of the O.F.S.  
East London Society for the Civilian Blind.

A report on the activities of the above societies will follow in a later chapter.

- <sup>1</sup> The factual content of this section about the founding and earlier history of the School for the Blind at Worcester was taken from the unpublished thesis of Dr P. E. Biesenbach which he submitted to the University of Stellenbosch for the degree of D.Ed. in 1942, and from a brochure titled *SOUVENIR*, published in 1931 by the Deaf and Blind Institute on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.
- <sup>2</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 25 – 26.
- <sup>3</sup> Later on the name is spelt De la Bat, also by Ds. De la Bat, grandson of the abovementioned Gert de Labat, who later succeeded his father, Jan de la Bat, as principal of the School for the Deaf at Worcester.
- <sup>4</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 30.
- <sup>5</sup> *Souvenir* (1881 – 1931), page 14.
- <sup>6</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 31.
- <sup>7</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, pages 45 – 46.
- <sup>8</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, pages 45 – 56.
- <sup>9</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 40.
- <sup>10</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 40.
- <sup>11</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, pages 52 – 53.
- <sup>12</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 53.
- <sup>13</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 66.
- <sup>14</sup> Farrall, G. *The Story of Blindness*. Harvard University Press, Boston.
- <sup>15</sup> The word *Asylum* was often used in those days for a school for the blind which had a section for resident pupils. Perhaps it was a tradition from the Middle Ages when blind people, on account of their social status, were usually housed with the poor and the destitute in asylums or institutions.
- <sup>16</sup> French, R. S.: *From Homer to Helen Keller*, page 99. (American Foundation for the Blind, New York.)
- <sup>17</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, pages 61 – 62.
- <sup>18</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 152.
- <sup>19</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 98.
- <sup>20</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 99.
- <sup>21</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 99.
- <sup>22</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 61.
- <sup>23</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 70.
- <sup>24</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, pages 69 – 70.
- <sup>25</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, pages 69 – 70.
- <sup>26</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 71.
- <sup>27</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 151.
- <sup>28</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 153.
- <sup>29</sup> Quoted by Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 438.
- <sup>30</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 105.
- <sup>31</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 438.
- <sup>32</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 104.
- <sup>33</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, page 104.
- <sup>34</sup> Biesenbach, P. E.: Thesis, pages 439 – 440.
- <sup>35</sup> Told to the present writer by one of the Marais brothers of Worcester in the thirties.
- <sup>36</sup> This information was obtained from the Chairman's report of the Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association (1961) as well as from a letter which Mrs A. Niven, a daughter of J. E. Palmer, had written to Mrs F. Robertshaw, Assistant secretary of the above Association. In general, information about the Association until 1938 is very incomplete.
- <sup>37</sup> As inscribed on the corner-stone of the Association's present building.
- <sup>38</sup> The name of the Association was changed to the above in 1942.
- <sup>39</sup> An account of the abovementioned conferences and the establishment of the S.A. National Council for the Blind will follow in a later chapter.
- <sup>40</sup> Fourth Biennial Report of the National Council (1935-1936) page 68.
- <sup>41</sup> Information gained from a talk by Miss J. E. Wood in 1923 (in manuscript form). Also from an article in *S.A. Libraries* (20) 1 15-17.
- <sup>42</sup> *S.A. Libraries* (20) 15-17. This was Miss Gladys Krause.
- <sup>43</sup> *S.A. Libraries* (20) 115-17. Reprint.
- <sup>44</sup> An American organization which gave financial assistance to libraries.
- <sup>45</sup> Letter to Miss E. Whitaker by Miss J. E. Wood.
- <sup>46</sup> Jubilee edition (1926-1976) of the Johannesburg Society for Civilian Blind, page 2.
- <sup>47</sup> The proceedings at the conferences and the foundation of the National Council will be elaborated on later.

- <sup>48</sup> The Cape Town Diocesan Magazine, 15 October 1941. (In possession of the Athlone School for the Blind)
- <sup>49</sup> A. W. Blaxall: *Blindness his Servant*. (A Monograph on the life of R. W. Bowen.)
- <sup>50</sup> Suburb of Cape Town.
- <sup>51</sup> Fiftieth report of the School, page 9.
- <sup>52</sup> In the district of Stellenbosch.
- <sup>53</sup> Miss M. H. Currey was the eldest of three Currey sisters who lived at Welgelegen, an estate near the Mostert Mill on the outskirts of Cape Town. All three sisters were at one time members of the school committee. Mary Currey remained a member up to her death at 94 years. (Told by Mr J. R. Solms, retired principal of the school).

## CHAPTER 2

### CO-ORDINATION AND FOUNDATION

In the preceding chapter a resumé was given of the initial efforts which were made with regard to the provision of services for the blind until approximately the year 1929. This indicated that there was enough interest shown to bring a group of persons together for a conference to co-ordinate the various efforts on a national basis. It was clear that the time was ripe for this, for when the idea spread, the reaction was remarkably favourable. Everybody was merely waiting for someone to take the lead. This duly happened. The person with whom the idea first originated was Miss Josephine Ethel Wood, head of the National Braille Library (as it was then called) at Grahamstown. It was then the only national organization for adult blind people, and she had thus come into contact with blind people from all parts of the country. As we noted in the previous chapter, there were at the time 176 readers who made use of the library, and further contact was made with approximately 500 others.<sup>1</sup> Although the Rev. (later Dr) A. W. Blaxall, along with Adv. R. W. Bowen, had a lion's share in the foundation of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, as will be seen later, it was the unassuming, perceptive Miss Wood who had sown the seed for its coming into being. Full recognition of this is found in a letter which Dr A. W. Baxall sent to the editor of *Imfama*, mouthpiece of the National Council. The section which deals with the matter is of historical interest, and reads as follows:

"I first met Josie Wood in January 1925 at Port Elizabeth where my wife and I were enjoying our first South African holiday. By that date I had already started preliminary work which led to the establishment of the Athlone School . . . Josie Wood had heard of these endeavours and she was also very much aware of the oldest welfare society for the blind — Our Own Blind Society in Durban — as well as several small groups growing up in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. Josie came down from



Grahamstown to Port Elizabeth because the need for co-ordination was much on her heart. She told me that in efforts to bring together several sub-sections for braille books in local libraries, she had been introduced to readers from all over the country. The outcome of that conversation came two years later at a meeting in Bloemfontein which set up two committees – one to draft a constitution for a Blind-work Council, and the other a Council concerning Deaf-work. The following year, 1928<sup>2</sup> (1929) the two Councils were well and truly established.”

Shortly before the meeting between Blaxall and Miss Wood the latter delivered a talk on the radio in which she gave an account of the activities of the library for the blind at Grahamstown. In the talk she made mention, *inter alia*, of numerous letters which she had received from blind people from different parts of South Africa who needed help. It made such an impression on her that she took the opportunity to make an appeal to women's organizations to establish committees or even societies for the care of the blind. Immediate reaction came from Mrs G. K. Nowlan of Johannesburg, Mrs R. P. Hannam of Port Elizabeth and Mrs L. Benjamin of Cape Town. All of them wrote for information and advice to start such societies.<sup>3</sup>

Three years elapsed (1925 to 1928) between the meeting of Miss Wood with Mr Blaxall and the holding of the conference which took place in Bloemfontein in June 1928. As a direct result of Miss Wood's contact with interested persons (all of them ladies), societies or committees on behalf of the blind were established during that period in Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth, while there were stirrings in Cape Town.

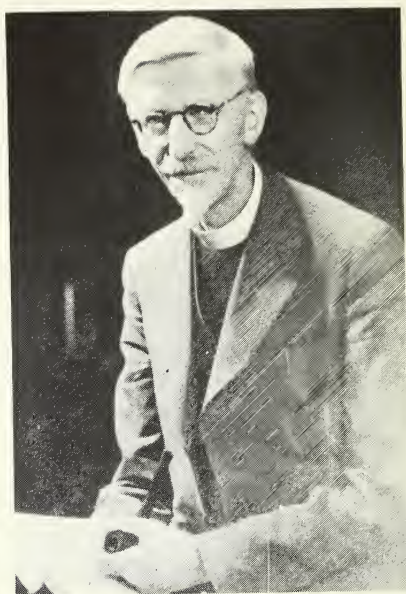
After his meeting with Miss Wood, Mr Blaxall visited the various societies and committees, as well as certain individuals who were involved, in order to sound them out as to the possibility of calling a conference with a view to the founding of a national co-ordinating body.

These visits, which necessarily caused him to travel extensively, were made possible by the fact that Mr Blaxall was then the missionary secretary of the Anglican Church, which took him to different parts of the country.

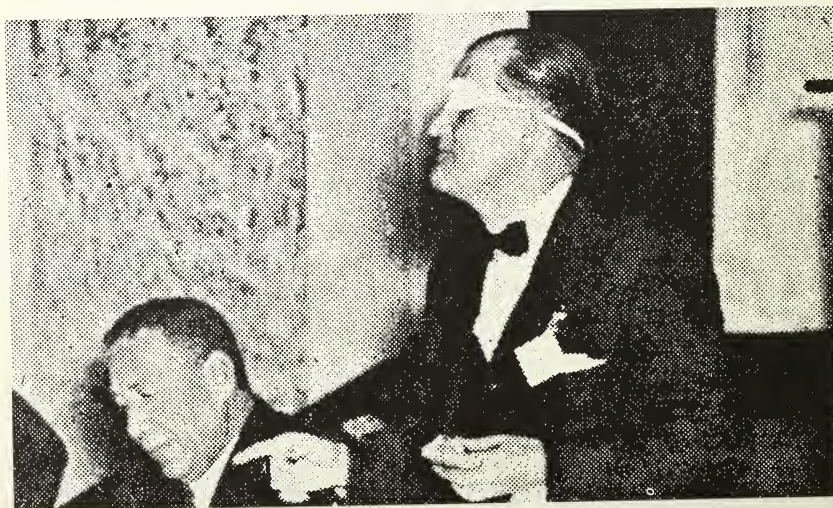
All organizations excepting two were enthusiastic about the idea of co-ordination and were willing to send representatives to a conference. The two which did not join were Our Own Blind Fund Association of Durban and the Worcester School for the Blind. The former did not



Miss J. E. Wood, founder of the S.A. Library for the Blind, co-founder of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.



Dr A. W. Blaxall, co-founder of the S.A. National Council for the Blind



Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith, first Organizing Secretary, with adv. R. W. Bowen at a meeting of the National Council, 1939, in Durban.

react to the Rev. Blaxall's letters and also sent no representative. With regard to the Worcester School for the Blind, he writes as follows : "I went to Worcester and had a long talk with Mr Besselaar, who frankly said he was opposed to after-care work as he believed the blind should be integrated back into the environment to which they belong."<sup>4</sup> This was evidently a personal decision of Mr Besselaar's and not of the Board of Management of the school, since Dr Biesenbach, who succeeded Mr Besselaar shortly afterwards, attended the second conference, held in March 1929, as the representative of the school.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that the Board of Management was concerned at one stage about the raising of funds by the National Council, considering that a large section of the country areas was under the impression that the Council's street collections were held on behalf of the Worcester School. Ds J.S. Murray considered it necessary to give an explanation of the situation in the Kerkbode, mouthpiece of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. Gradually the confusion disappeared completely. From the outset Dr Biesenbach played a leading role in the activities of the Council. He was elected as a member of the Executive Committee of Council at the foundation meeting.

As regards the organization in Natal, the real reason for the absence of a representative was never given, but affiliation to the National Council did in any case take place later on through the mediation of Advocate R. W. Bowen, Council's first Chairman.

Before describing the proceedings of the conference it is necessary to deal with another aspect of representation. This concerns the St Dunstan's Society for War-blinded, an organization which was brought into being in England during the First World War (1914 - 1918) with branches in the various countries of the former British Empire and later of the British Commonwealth of Nations, to which South Africa also belonged.

Dr Blaxall mentions that he was confronted with a great deal of animosity from societies for the blind because of the fact that large sums of money collected in this country were sent to England for their blinded soldiers there.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless Blaxall invited the St Dunstan's Society to send a representative to the conference, to which they agreed. The assumption was that South Africa's war-blinded soldiers also formed part of the blind population of this country.

Two persons who were also invited to attend the conference were Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, inspector of education of the then Union Educa-



tion Department, and Advocate R. W. Bowen, blind member of the Provincial Council for a Cape constituency. Blaxall considered their presence as being indispensable on account of their knowledge of and interest in the blind.

After the necessary arrangements had been made the date for the conference was set for 22 June 1928, to be held in the Jubileum Hall, Bloemfontein.

The following were present:

The Rev. A. W. Blaxall, Cape Town

Adv. R. W. Bowen, Cape Town

Mr C. C. Church, Kimberley

Mrs R. P. Hannam, Port Elizabeth

Mrs T. Hoepner, Pretoria

Mrs G. K. Nowlan, Johannesburg

Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, Pretoria

Mr R. C. Streeten, Bloemfontein

Mr J. C. van der Walt, Kimberley

Mrs C. H. Vintcent, George

Rev. J. D. Vincent, Bloemfontein

Mrs H. Wiley, Bloemfontein

Miss J. E. Wood, Grahamstown

Mr Frank G. Barnes, London, England.

With regard to the above the following information can be given:

Mr Barnes was a retired principal of Raynor's School for Blind and Deaf Children in Penn, Buckinghamshire, England. He had come to South Africa to visit his sister for a few months in Cape Town. He must have been a well-known educationist in England, for Blaxall wrote in a memorandum published on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the National Council: "We had the good fortune of his counsel and guidance in preparing an agenda for our Conference." Dr. van Schalkwijk also referred to him as the "Nestor" of education of the blind and deaf in England, whose reputation preceded him here.<sup>7</sup>

Mr C. C. Church was blind and had a mattress-making business in Kimberley. He also trained adult blind people. He even took them in as boarders and charged them only a nominal fee. The instruction which they received was free of charge. Mr Van der Walt who attended the conference with him was one of the persons who had received instruction from him at that time. Van der Walt later made mattresses at



Kestell, O.F.S. When Mr Church later (approximately in 1934) received a new teasing machine from the National Council, he gave his old one to Mr Van der Walt.<sup>8</sup>

Mrs C. H. Vintcent was head of the St. Dunstan's After-care Department for South African Blinded Soldiers. As part of her work she had to visit each of the 18 South African war-blinded men twice a year. This took her all over the country. She was in possession of the British O.B.E. in recognition of her services.

Mrs R. P. Hannam was President of the National Council of Women and resided at Port Elizabeth. The organization had a sub-committee for the care of the handicapped.

The first task of the meeting was to elect a chairman. Adv. Bowen was nominated but he declined. According to the Rev. Arthur Blaxall it proved to be a wise decision, because Bowen, as a war-blinded person, enjoyed the patronage of St Dunstan's, and at the meeting there were heated arguments at times concerning certain aspects of St Dunstan's actions. Under those circumstances Bowen would have been placed in a very invidious position. The Rev. Blaxall was consequently elected as Chairman.

In connection with this Blaxall writes:

"I was voted to the Chair after Advocate Bowen had refused nomination (wisely, as it proved when a rather acrimonious discussion took place about St Dunstan's). I do not know what he would have done when Mrs Vintcent, O.B.E., St Dunstan's, and Mrs Nowlan of Johannesburg, leapt to their feet and faced each other across the table which was as near as they could get to tearing out each other's eyes — nor do I recall how I got them to sit down."<sup>9</sup>

After the Chairman had been elected the meeting was opened with prayer by Ds P. J. Boshoff, Moderator of the Orange Free State N.G. Church. After that the Deputy Mayor of Bloemfontein, Mr S. Harris, welcomed the delegates and expressed the hope that the meeting would be successful.

The Chairman then asked Miss J. E. Wood of the Library for the Blind at Grahamstown to act as secretary. She would have to keep the minutes of the discussions and resolutions. She was also requested to receive all donations for safe-keeping until such time as provision for proper bookkeeping could be made. Miss Wood was thus at the outset both secretary and treasurer.



First Conference held in Bloemfontein on 22 July 1928 to establish a S.A. National Council for the Blind. Back row: Mr C. C. Church (Kimberley), Adv. R. W. Bowen, M.P.C. (Cape Town), Mrs Vincent (George), Dr Louis van Schalkwijk (Pretoria), the Rev A. W. Blaxall (Cape Town), Mr Van der Walt (Kimberley), Mr F. G. Barnes (Londen). Front Row: Mrs Hugh Wiley (Bloemfontein), Miss J. Wood (Grahamstown), Mrs G. K. Nowlan (Johannesburg), Mrs R. P. Hamman (Port Elizabeth), Mrs T. Hoepner (Pretoria).

After the opening formalities the Chairman asked the various delegates to report to the Conference on the position of blind care in their own communities.

Miss Josie Wood began by giving an account of the work of the Library for the Blind at Grahamstown. She mentioned that the library had 2 000 braille volumes which were loaned to 176 readers. The Library was also in contact with more than 500 blind people. Books for the blind were sent through the post at a reduced rate to all parts of South Africa and Rhodesia.

The following speaker was Dr Louis van Schalkwijk who spoke a word of welcome on behalf of the then Union Education Department (now National Education). He explained, inter alia, that work among the blind had already been done at Worcester for the past forty years. Since 1925 the Union Education Department had taken responsibility for all "defective" children in the country. There was a deficiency in the legislation, however, as there was no clause which made education for these children compulsory. He doubted whether the education of the handicapped could be successful without compulsory education. There were also no statistics available, and on account of this it was difficult for the Department to undertake a programme of development. Parents were sensitive about making the handicaps of their children known, with the result that statistics were unreliable. The Athlone School for Coloured children had just recently begun.

Mrs C. H. Vintcent of George then explained the kind of after-care work which was being done for war-blinded men. In South Africa at that stage there were eighteen returned soldiers from the war of 1914-1918 who had been blinded in battle. Her committee aimed at a regular income of £2 000 (R4 000) to £3 000 (R6 000) per annum to aid these persons, especially with the object of providing for their widows and families should they die. A certain Mrs Reid had donated £5 000 (R10 000) to the organization during the visit of the Prince of Wales to South Africa (1925). From this sum motor cars had been donated to three persons.

After this Mrs G. K. Nowlan of Johannesburg inquired about reports that large sums of money which were collected in South Africa for St Dunstan's were sent abroad.

Mrs Vintcent replied that during the first year approximately £12 000 (R24 000) had been collected. Since then an average of £3 000 (R6 000) had been sent out of South Africa yearly. But since



then the head office of St Dunstan's in London had given her committee instructions to retain only 25 per cent of the collected funds. The Chairman (Mr Blaxall) also mentioned in his report that there was confusion among the public because they were of the opinion that if they gave money for St Dunstan's, they were contributing towards the work amongst all blind people in South Africa. In all fairness to St Dunstan's it must however be mentioned that they always tried to state clearly that their collections were intended only for blinded ex-soldiers. In this respect Rev. Blaxall writes: "They (St Dunstan's) have always been scrupulously careful to explain that their collections are not for the civilian blind of the Union".<sup>10</sup> For this reason the terms "civilian blind" and "war-blinded" came into use. Today we still use the connotation "civilian blind" in connection with most of our societies for the blind.

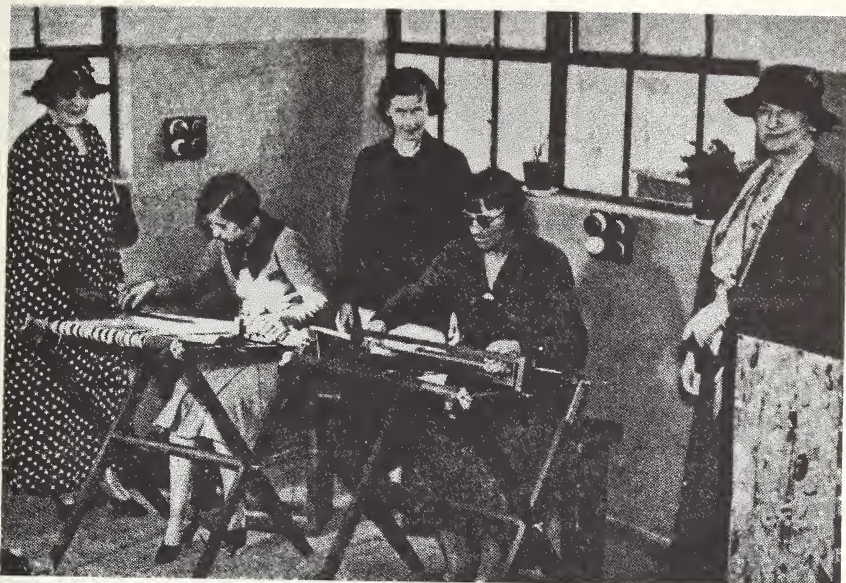
Although the report of the Conference did not make mention of the wrangles which took place among some of the delegates, it is true that, according to Mr Blaxall's remarks, there was a serious difference of opinion over the activities of St Dunstan's as regards their fundraising. With regard to affiliation, St Dunstan's of South Africa did not have the authority to affiliate with the proposed S.A. National Council for the Blind.

After this Mrs G. K. Nowlan described the work which was being done by the Johannesburg After-care Committee. It had been established about two years previously as a result of a radio talk by Miss Wood. The Committee had already made contact with 69 blind people. Most of the workers had been trained at Worcester and worked at their homes. The After-care Committee undertook the task of taking in stock all the completed articles which the blind had made, and selling them on their behalf. This would ensure that the marketing of the articles would be more profitable. The aim was to establish an Institute for the Blind in Johannesburg.

Mrs T. Hoepner of Pretoria reported that the Pretoria Committee had been established in July 1927. They were in contact with 17 blind people in Pretoria and with a few in the rural districts. They also had taken orders for their blind workers, and had undertaken the marketing of the completed articles.

As regards Port Elizabeth, Mrs R. P. Hannam reported that there was no after-care work for the blind, but the National Council of





Lady Clarendon (left) visits the workshop of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society on 20 May 1936. In the centre is Miss A. Brown, the instructress and right Mrs G. N. Nowlan of the Johannesburg Society. (Miss Brown is now Mrs G. S. Schermbrucker). (Photo: Cape Argus).



Extract from the Cape Times of 27 August: 1937: "In the picture above, blind workers from the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society are seen leaving their work, led by an escort who carries a red flag of warning to motorists as he takes them down to the station to catch their trains."

Women had established a sub-committee with the object of promoting the interests of the blind.

With regard to Cape Town, Adv. Bowen answered as follows when the Chairman asked him what was being done there for the blind: "That is very easy. In Cape Town nothing is being done." The fact of the matter was that work for adult<sup>11</sup> blind only began late in 1928 according to the testimony of Miss Marjorie Watson. She writes as follows:<sup>12</sup>

"One day in May, 1928, I received a phone call from Lil Bowen asking if I would like to join her in starting a little society for the benefit of a number of blind persons whom she had discovered being in seclusion in the Peninsula . . . Lil Bowen and I were equally excited when, on September 6th of the same year, the first meeting was held to inaugurate our work for the blind."

Adv. Bowen continued by mentioning the important work done by St Dunstan's of which he was very proud. He also stated that St Dunstan's would not exist for always. "It would die out with the last incumbents. Soldiers who turned blind from now onwards would have to be treated as civilian blind. He hoped therefore that the Conference would appreciate the needs of the civilian blind." Thus the report.

Circumstances sadly proved to be different. Nobody could foresee at that time that St Dunstan's, twenty years after the declaration of peace which ended the First World War, would again have to play a leading role on behalf of a later group of war-blinded soldiers during the Second World War (1939 - 1945). Today, thirty-four years later, St Dunstan's still has a task to fulfil. It has not yet ceased to exist.

Mrs H. Wiley of the Orange Free State spoke about the role which the Girl Guides had played in inviting blind girls to join their movement. There was as yet no organization for the care of the blind in the province.

Mr Frank G. Barnes of England then addressed the Conference. He laid special emphasis on those matters which were of immediate importance to South Africa. Firstly he pointed out that compulsory education for blind children between the ages of five and sixteen years had already existed in England since 1894. Secondly he mentioned that some of them had been given the opportunity to study at universities through bursaries which were made available by the authorities. Thirdly there was a register of all blind persons in England, with a pension scheme. Opportunities to be employed in ordinary industries



were created, with the result that there were 46 000 blind persons in open labour in England and Wales at that time. He stressed the fact that profitable work for the blind had to be the aim. Finally he expressed the hope that the blind of South Africa would be an asset to the country through their usefulness.

When the Conference resumed in the afternoon, Mrs R. P. Hannam of Port Elizabeth submitted the following resolution:-

“That this Conference of representatives from various organizations working on behalf of the blind of South Africa, is of the opinion that the time has arrived for the formation of the National Council for the Welfare of the Blind in South Africa.”

In her motivation she said, *inter alia*, that co-ordination of effort was absolutely essential in the interests of the blind of our country. She drew attention to the fact that there was still confusion among the public as regards the position of St Dunstan's. Many still thought that St Dunstan's acted on behalf of all blind people in South Africa. Personally she desired to see one combined organization formed, something in the form of a national institute which would not discourage private enterprise.

Mrs H. Wiley seconded the motion.

During the discussion the question of co-operation with the St Dunstan's organization was again raised. The following is quoted from the report of the proceedings of the Conference:

“Mrs Vintcent said she desired to make it quite clear that St Dunstan's was concerned only with blinded soldiers. She has no authority to say that St Dunstan's could be incorporated in a National Council for the Civilian Blind. That had to be decided by Captain Fraser, the head of St Dunstan's.”

Later in the report the following appears:

“Mrs Vintcent suggested that it should be made abundantly clear that the National Council would be concerned only with civilian blind. She did not want the work of St Dunstan's prejudiced through a misunderstanding.”

Advocate Bowen's comment was that St Dunstan's interests lay only with blinded ex-soldiers, of whom there were 18 in the country at that time. It should not keep the Conference from establishing an organization which would take care of the interests of thousands of blind people. He repeated that as soon as the last beneficiary died, St Dunstan's in South Africa would cease to exist. Then the residue of the

fund in its possession might be applied to the benefit of the blind in general. But that was a matter for the future.

The question which was debated after this — with Mrs Nowlan to the fore — was whether the proposed National Council would indeed be national in the fullest sense of the word should such a big organization as St Dunstan's stay outside.

The mover (Mrs R. P. Hannam) said she preferred not to qualify her resolution. The Rev. J. D. Vincent of Bloemfontein also expressed the view that it would be a contradiction in terms to qualify the word "national". The feeling was thus fairly general that all organizations should show their willingness to become affiliated and in this way make the body truly "national". But to this the Chairman replied that no one had a mandate from his or her organization to commit the latter to affiliation. The organizations would have to decide on the question of affiliation themselves.

Adv. Bowen thereupon moved that the matter should not be complicated by all kinds of qualifying clauses and other obstructions. He heartily supported the resolution. Mrs Hannam's resolution was thereupon unanimously carried.

Immediately after this Adv. Bown moved that a sub-committee be appointed to draw up a draft constitution. The following were appointed: Rev. A. W. Blaxall, Adv. R. W. Bowen, Mr R. C. Streeten and Dr L. Van Schalkwijk. The draft constitution would be discussed and finalised at the next Conference which would take place in Cape Town at the beginning of the following year (1929) during the parliamentary session.

Two important matters occupied the attention of the Conference after this. The one was the question of finances and the other the autonomy of the various societies.

In the first place it was decided that one day of the year should be set aside for fundraising, and at the same time to focus public attention on the needs of the blind in the community. After different dates had been discussed it was decided on the first Saturday in May.

Mrs Vintcent again stressed the non-alignment of St Dunstan's and explained that St Dunstan's could not participate in collections on such a day. Thus, instead of the name South African Blind Day, Mrs Nowlan proposed that the day be known as S.A. Blind (Civilian) Day.<sup>13</sup>

That opinions were strongly divided, is shown by a tie in the voting. The resolution was however defeated by the Chairman's casting vote. A



resolution was passed that the day be known as South African Blind Day<sup>14</sup>

In connection with the autonomy of societies both the Chairman and Adv. Bowen stressed that there should be no interference in the activities or finances of individual societies.

Towards the end the Conference passed certain resolutions, the objectives of which were briefly as follows:

- (a) that the blind be visited and their needs be determined;
- (b) that braille and trades be taught to those unable to go to Worcester, and orders for their work obtained;
- (c) that functions be arranged in order to exhibit and sell finished articles; that displays be arranged at industrial shows and depots opened where articles could be sold;
- (d) that a home teacher be appointed to visit especially those persons who had become blind in adult life;
- (e) that sighted persons be interested to learn braille, and to pass the test either in Afrikaans or in English, urging in this connection that an Afrikaans primer be prepared and published.

After motions of thanks to the Chairman and Miss J. Wood the meeting adjourned.

In a later report on the Conference Rev. Blaxall made special mention of the good spirit and the feeling of solidarity which had prevailed.

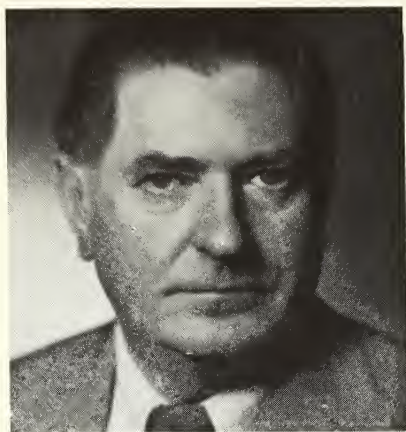
In the meantime the sub-committee appointed to draft the constitution proceeded with its task, while Miss J. Wood continued to do the secretarial work and to make arrangements for convening the second Conference in Cape Town.

The second or continuation Conference was held in the committee room of the Argus Building in Cape Town on Monday 18 March 1929.

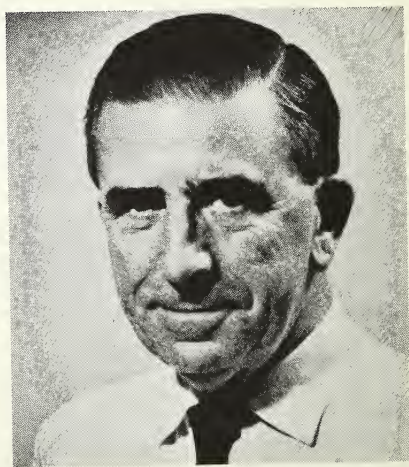
The minutes of this Conference are handwritten in the typical strongly bound minute book of those days. Fortunately the book was preserved and today it is a very valuable document, especially for the researcher. Later on the minutes were typed and pasted in the book.

The attendance list at the beginning of the minutes shows a marked increase in the number of delegates. Mention was made of the existence of various societies which came into being during the recess of nine months between the two conferences.

For historical reasons it is necessary to give the list precisely as it was reported in the handwritten minutes:



Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, founder member of the S.A. National Council for the Blind and Chairman from 1952 to 1961.



Mr A. B. W. Marlow, former Principal of the Athlone School for the Blind, Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, 1962-1966.

"The delegates were as follows:

The Education Department — Dr L. van Schalkwijk

The Department of the Interior — Dr M. L. Fick

The Department of Labour — R. Beattie, Esq.

The National Council of Child Welfare — Mrs A. E. Horwood

The School for the Blind, Worcester — P. E. Biesenbach, Esq.

The Athlone School for the Blind — Mr S. H. Lawrence and Mrs Lawrence

The Society for the Welfare of the Blind, Johannesburg — Mrs G. K. Nowlan

The Civilian Blind Society, Pretoria — Mrs T. Hoepner

The Civilian Blind Society, Port Elizabeth — Mrs R. P. Hannam

The Civilian Blind Society, Cape Town — Mrs R. W. Bowen

The Blinded Soldiers After Care Society — C. H. Vintcent, Esq.

The Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging — Mrs A. L. Geyer

Die Oranje Vroue Vereniging — Mrs F. X. Roome

The Extension Branch, the Girl Guides — Mrs Campbell

The Nat. Council Constitution Committee — Adv. R. W. Bowen

The Nat. Council Constitution Committee (appd.-1928) — Rev. A. W. Blaxall."

The above names are exactly as they appear in the handwritten minutes. A typed copy of the list of delegates and those invited to attend was pasted next to it, and is probably more complete. The following names were added:

"National Library for the Blind, Grahamstown — Miss. J. Wood

Suid-Afrikaanse Vroue Federasie — Mrs Rhodes

Helpmekaar Vereniging — Mrs H. Roux

Armesorg Kommissie — Rev. P. J. Perold

Transvaal Agricultural Women's (Association) — Mrs Neethling

National Council of Women — Mrs Nowlan."

To this was added a list of 15 persons who were invited in their private capacity on account of their interest in the blind. Among them were Mr C. Church of Kimberley who had attended the first Conference at Bloemfontein, Mr W. P. Marais of Robertson, Mrs E. Greenwood, wife of Mr Harold Greenwood, music teacher at the Worcester School for the Blind, Mrs M. Schermbrucker of Stellenbosch, wife of the then magistrate of Stellenbosch and mother of Mr Gerald Schermbrucker, well-known physiotherapist, and Mr A. Kirstein, war-blinded physiotherapist. He attended the Worcester School for the Blind for

some time after he had become blind. There were thus altogether 37 persons present at the second Conference in comparison with 14 at the first. The interest in, and services to the blind had thus grown considerably during the preceding nine months.

In connection with the accuracy of the names list it will be noted that in the written minutes Mrs Campbell is mentioned as being the representative of the Extension Branch, Girl Guides, whereas in the typed copy the representative was given as Mrs Baker. Mrs Geyer was the wife of Dr A. L. Geyer, the editor of *Die Burger* at that time, and later the High Commissioner in London. Mrs Roome was the wife of the well known Ds. F. X. Roome of Cape Town. It is also noteworthy that Mr (later Dr) P. E. Biesenbach, principal of the Worcester School for the Blind, attended the Conference, considering that his predecessor, Mr M. J. Besselaar, was not prepared to attend the first one. It is clear that a change had come about in the viewpoint of the Worcester School with the advent of the new principal. He assumed duty in the period between the two conferences, in January 1929. The Natal organization "Our Own Blind Fund Association" sent no representative.

No information could be found anywhere of how it had happened that the various bodies which had no direct contact with the blind were represented at the Conference. Here we think especially of organizations such as *Die Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging*, *Die Oranje Vrouevereniging*, *Die S. A. Vroue-Federasie*, *Die Helpmekaar-vereniging*, *Die Armesorg-Kommissie van die N.G. Kerk*, and *Die Transvaalse Vroue-landbouvereniging*. The Federal Council of Dutch Churches was invited, but a letter of apology from Ds. J. P. van Heerden was read to say that he could not attend.

It was indeed stated at the beginning of the minutes of the Conference : "The Rev. A. W. Blaxall explained briefly how the Conference came to be convened," but there is no further evidence about the specific manner in which the Conference was constituted.

It is presumed that Miss Wood, who made the arrangements for the Conference, had consulted Dr Biesenbach in connection with likely people and bodies who could be invited to attend. There had always been very close links between the S.A. Library for the Blind and the Worcester School for the Blind.

Before a chairman was elected, the Rev. Blaxall announced that Dr D. F. Malan, Minister of Union Education at the time, who would have



opened the Conference was unfortunately prevented from doing so, and that he had asked Dr S. F. N. Gie, Secretary for Union Education, to act in his place.

Dr Gie conveyed the good wishes of Dr Malan for the successful functioning of the Conference and for its future activities. Dr Gie expressed his personal appreciation for the interest shown in the blind. He stated further that the Government was well aware of its responsibilities and was prepared to do its utmost to further the efforts made by granting subsidies where they appeared to be necessary. He warned however that the Conference should not pass resolutions and measures which the Department, however willing to help, could not approve. "Festina lente" should be the watchword.<sup>15</sup>

Mr Blaxall asked Dr Gie to preside at the meeting until a chairman had been elected.

After being proposed by Adv. Bowen, the Rev. Blaxall was unanimously voted to the Chair. Ds Perold was elected as Deputy Chairman and Miss Wood and Mr Lawrence as secretaries.

The first question which had to be settled was who were eligible to take part in the discussions, and therefore entitled to vote. Apparently there was a fair amount of discussion about this, to judge by the proposals and amendments which were submitted. Eventually it was decided that all persons who had received an invitation to attend the Conference would be entitled to take part in the discussions and to vote, but only those delegates from accredited societies or persons who worked directly on behalf of the blind would have the right to vote on matters relating to the constitution. The printed report of the Conference which was held in Bloemfontein on 22 June 1928 was regarded as the minutes. It was taken as read and approved.

After this the financial statement of receipts and expenditure was read.

This document, which was affixed to the minutes, is interesting, even if only to show on what a small scale the work had begun. Of course it is not always possible to assess the growth of the work by the revenue and expenditure, but it is a good indication. Here follows the first complete financial statement:

# STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

	£	s	d
<b>Receipts</b>			
Sent to Miss Wood:			
Sept. 18th (per Mrs Hannam)	28	3	6
Nov. 27th (per Mrs Bowen)	25	0	6
Sent to Rev. A. W. Blaxall:			
Various small sums	2	0	0
March 8th (per Johannesburg)	25	0	0
March 8th (per Pretoria)	15	15	0
	<u>£ 95</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>0</u>

## Expenditure

Aug. 16th Penny stamps	4	10	0
Halfpenny stamps	1	5	0
Sept. 1st Halfpenny stamps		5	0
Aug. 16th (Grocott & Sherry) printing 2 000 pamphlets	10	16	0
Aug. 8th (Grocott & Sherry) 1 000 envelopes	1	1	0
Aug. 13th (Grocott & Sherry) 1 000 envelopes	1	1	0
Sept. 6th (Grocott & Sherry) printing 500 copies	2	13	9
Oct. 1st Stamps		5	0
Nov. 6th Stamps		4	0
Nov. 27th Exchange on cheque		1	3
	<u>£ 22</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>

Received	£95	19	0 (R191,90)
Expended	£22	2	0 (R 44,20)
Balance in hand	<u>£73</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>0 (R147,70)</u>

The expenditure was approved by the Conference, and the financial statement was accepted. The Conference then voted £40 (R80) for office expenses for the following year.

It should however be realised that the money received came without any organized fundraising and without an office or paid staff. A summary of the financial statement will be given later, as reflected in the biennial report of 1931.

It is regrettable that no record was kept of the contents of the "2 000 pamphlets" or the "500 copies" which were printed and were specified as expenditure in the financial statements. The published report of the first Conference (12 pages) was printed by Grocott and Sherry, Gra-

Wednesday - 20<sup>th</sup> The Conference resumed its sitting at 9.30<sup>AM</sup>

The Minutes were read & confirmed.

Draft Constitution Clauses 3 & 4.

These were presented in an amended form

after some discussion & a slight further amendment adopted

The Whole Constitution in its amended form (as attached to these minutes)

Proposed by Mrs Nowlan, Mr Lawrence Seconded that  
it be adopted.

Agreed

This brings into existence The National Council.

(Facsimile of original minutes)

Wednesday - 20th The Conference resumed its sitting at 9.30 a.m.

The Minutes were read and confirmed

Draft Constitution Clauses 3 & 4

These were presented in an amended form.

After some discussion and a slight further amendment adopted.

The whole Constitution in its amended form (as attached to these minutes)

Proposed by Mrs Nowlan, Mr Lawrence seconded that it be adopted - agreed

This brings into existence The National Council.

hamstown, and it is possible that 500 copies were produced. The question is why such a large number of the report, and further, why as many as 2 000 pamphlets? Of these, according to our knowledge, not a single copy exists today. It is likely that the pamphlet was meant for publicity purposes.

The next matter to be dealt with was the draft constitution as drawn up by the sub-committee appointed for the purpose by the Bloemfontein Conference. The draft constitution as well as the one which was approved were both incorporated in the minutes of the Cape Town Conference. That the committee did its work well is evident from the fact that only a few amendments were necessary. The chief problem appears to have been the membership of the Council. The two clauses in question were referred back to the sub-committee for reconsideration. The following morning (Wednesday 20 March, 1928) they were approved.

It is understandable that amendments and additions would necessarily have had to be made through the years according to the demands of the times and as a result of the growth and expansion of the services, but fundamentally the first constitution differs only slightly from the present one. If one looks at the section "Aims and functions", it appears to have stayed basically the same down the years. A distinguishing feature of the first constitution was the emphasis placed on the expansion of services and on the gathering of information and data on blindness in general.

Furthermore the constitution reflects certain conditions which existed in the form of gaps which still had to be filled. There were at the time no specific legislation, no compulsory education, and no organized efforts for the prevention of blindness.

The prospect of legislation was held out in clause 2(d) which read as follows:

"To take steps as may be necessary for securing the proper administration of all Acts of Parliament and ordinances dealing with the blind, and to promote any legislation that may be considered necessary for the general welfare of the blind."

The absence of compulsory education for the handicapped was the reason why no fewer than four clauses involved the education of the blind. We quote the clauses in question:

"2(g) To endeavour to obtain statistical data regarding the Blind, particularly in connection with children of schoolgoing age.



- 2(h) To investigate any questions or proposals with reference to the education, training, employment or well-being of the Blind, or otherwise affecting their interests.
- 2(i) To give advice, counsel and assistance to the Blind, and to those charged or concerned with their education, training, employment, or well-being.
- 2(j) To promote all secondary and higher education, vocational as well as academic, for the Blind, when the interests of the Blind demand or justify it."

Dr Louis van Schalkwijk's contribution is clearly seen in this section of the constitution. As inspector of special education of the then Union Department of Education, he was indeed busy with representations for the establishment of a system for compulsory education for deaf and blind children. A clause such as 2(g) would strengthen his hand because a State Department usually requires statistics to evaluate the extent of a project before a decision can be made. In connection with this section of the constitution, 2(j) gives us a good insight into the matter. Although the matriculation course was first introduced into a school for the blind in South Africa only in 1943, such a development, as well as university training, was then already held in prospect.

As a whole therefore the sub-committee concerned with the drawing up of the draft constitution showed an extraordinary insight as to what the future should hold in respect of matters pertaining to the welfare of the blind. This must be due to the background and knowledge of the persons who took the initiative in those days. Consequently it appears that the time was ripe for the co-ordination and expansion of the work. The discussions, resolutions and reports of that time (as also reflected in the constitution) show that everyone was ready for purposeful action on behalf of all sections of the blind community. All the more reason therefore that we should pay tribute to Miss J. Wood and Dr A. W. Blaxall, who did yeoman service and for many years after continued with it; and secondly to Adv. R. W. Bowen, Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, Mr P. E. Biesenbach, Mrs J. M. Pienaar, Mrs H. Wiley, Mrs G. K. Nowlan, Mrs L. Bowen and Miss A. Gillies — all of whom were in the forefront.

After the constitution had been approved the Conference con-

tinued with discussions on the welfare of the blind in general and important resolutions were taken. A summary of the resolutions follows here. They are tabulated in the minutes under the heading: "Findings of the Conference".

The first resolution dealt with the necessity of compulsory education for the blind.

The second resolution dealt with the necessity of regular medical inspection in ordinary schools with a view to identifying children with eye and sight problems.

Resolution no. 3 was concerned with the definition of blindness. It read as follows:

"Definition of blindness: That this Conference considers that for educational and non-educational purposes the following definitions be adopted respectively:

- (a) too blind to read ordinary school books;
- (b) too blind to be able to do work for which eyesight is essential."

The fourth resolution had four sections. It dealt mainly with the education of blind children, the training of teachers, adult education and provision of some kind for the mentally handicapped blind child.

The fifth resolution stressed the necessity for the appointment of home teachers. The conference requested the government to appoint itinerant home teachers and to subsidise their posts.

An appeal was also made to interested persons to learn braille so that handwritten books could be transcribed for the National Library for the Blind.

Concerning finances, the resolution of the Bloemfontein Conference was confirmed namely that a country-wide fundraising campaign should be launched annually on the first Saturday in May. It would be called: **Our Blind Day**. The aim was not only to raise funds, but also to spread information about blindness throughout the country. Local committees should be formed to make the necessary arrangements. It was suggested, inter alia, that churches should be asked to have special sermons preached about blindness, and to organize collections on behalf of the National Council on the following Sunday. It was also decided that all moneys should be sent to the office of the National Council, which would then refund a sum not exceeding 50 % of the amount to the organising committee. This money would be used locally for the benefit of the blind in that community, according to their needs.

After this the activities of the Conference came to an end. After the customary votes of thanks were passed, the Chairman asked Ds Rooome to close with prayer. At 4 p.m. the Conference adjourned.

The first meeting of the newly constituted South African National Council for the Blind started immediately after this, and the minutes reveal that it took place at 4 o'clock on Wednesday, 20th March 1929 in the conference hall of the Argus Building, St George's Street, Cape Town.

It thus appears that there was no break between the two meetings. The Conference closed at 4 p.m., and the Council meeting started at 4 p.m.

Adjacent to this section is a reproduction of a page of the minutes of the first meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind. It will be noted that the initial task was to constitute the Council properly by inviting requests for affiliation to the Council. Such a procedure was necessary in view of the fact that the Council was co-ordinative, and could not exist without its affiliated bodies. Six bodies affiliated immediately and the seventh (Worcester Institute for the Blind) did so conditionally. Dr Biesenbach explained that he was indeed applying for affiliation but that the application was subject to confirmation by the Board of Management of the Worcester Institute for the Deaf and the Blind.

Applications for representation on the Council were then invited and eight persons applied on behalf of their various bodies. Two persons, Dr L. van Schalkwyk and Dr M. L. Fick, announced that they officially represented State Departments, namely Union Education and Interior respectively.

The following is the first group of bodies<sup>16</sup> which were affiliated to the S.A. National Council, in the order in which they were recorded in the minutes, with the names of the persons who applied:

The Athlone School for the Blind, Cape Town, by Adv. R. W. Bowen M.P.C.

The Johannesburg Institute for Blind Workers, by Mrs G. K. Nowlan.

Committee for the Care of the Blind, Port Elizabeth, by Mrs R. P. Hannam.

Committee for the Care of the Blind, Pretoria, by Mrs T. Hoepner.  
The Cape Society for Civilian Blind, by Mrs L. Bowen.

S.A. National Library for the Blind, Grahamstown, by Miss J. Wood.

Institute for the Blind, Worcester, by Mr P. E. Biesenbach, (subject to confirmation by the Board of Management).

Applications for representation<sup>17</sup> on the National Council for the Blind:

Die Algemene Armesorg Kommissie van die N.G. Kerk, by Ds P. J. Perold.

The National Council for Child Welfare, by Dr L. van Schalkwijk.

The National Council of Women, by Mrs R. P. Hannam.

Subject to confirmation by their various committees, also the following:

Die Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging, by Mrs Geyer.

Die Oranje-vrouevereniging. (It is not clear who proposed; it may possibly have been Mrs Visser).

Die S. A. Vroue-federasie, by Mrs Rhodes.

Die Helpmekaar-vereniging, by Ds F. X. Roome.

Mrs E. Kayser applied on behalf of the Provisional Committee of East London, either for affiliation or for representation according to the ruling of the Council.

After the applications for affiliation and representation were concluded, the Rev. A. W. Blaxall asked for nominations for a Chairman.

First Mr Blaxall and then Ds Perold were nominated by Adv. Bowen but both declined. After this Adv. Bowen was nominated and he agreed to accept the chairmanship. The following morning, however, when the Council again met, Adv. Bowen informed the meeting that he did not see his way clear to accept the chairmanship. The minutes read as follows:

"The Chairman stated that he felt the duties of directing the work of the Council would be more than he could undertake and so begged to tender his resignation."

After persuasion by the members of Council, and the assurance given him that he had a free hand to make any arrangements he might think fit with regard to secretarial work (until a secretary was appointed), he expressed his appreciation for the trust that was put in him, and withdrew his resignation. His decision was met with unanimous approval.

After the election of the Chairman, nominations were invited for a Deputy Chairman and five members of the Executive Committee. The



following members were elected:

Chairman: Adv. R. W. Bowen

Deputy Chairman: Ds P. J. Perold

Executive Committee:

Mrs G. K. Nowlan

Mr P. E. Biesenbach

Dr L. van Schalkwijk

Rev. A. W. Blaxall (From May to October 1929, with Miss J. Wood as alternate)

A representative of the Oranje-Vroue-vereniging.

The reason for the last nominee was probably to comply with the clause in the constitution which stipulated that everything possible should be done to have a representative from each province on the Executive Committee. It is likely that Natal was not taken into consideration because the Natal Society for the Blind stood aloof and was not represented at either of the two conferences.

Following this, the appointment of a permanent secretary occupied the attention of the Committee. The Executive Committee was instructed to make arrangements for such an appointment. Mr Blaxall agreed to act as temporary secretary in the interim up to the end of April 1929.

Two other matters, namely the nomination of honorary officials, and the venue of head office were referred to the Executive Committee.

The Council adjourned at five o'clock and assembled again the following morning, Thursday 21 March, at 9.30 in a room of the Hugenote-gedenkteken in Victoria Street, Cape Town.

The Council once more considered the resolution concerning the national day for the blind, and decided that more than 50% could be refunded to the local committees or societies depending on the activities of the organization. Application for this should be made to the Executive Committee.

An interesting resolution was taken in regard to the centenary of the braille system. The resolution, according to the minutes, read as follows:

"That this Council do here record its most sincere appreciation of the life and work of Louis Braille, by means of which happiness has been brought to hundreds of blind people in South Africa in common with blind people throughout the world. A copy of this resolution to be sent to the N.I.B.<sup>18</sup> in London."

Another important resolution which was taken by the Council at its meeting dealt with the treatment of expectant mothers with venereal disease which might damage the eyes of newborn babies, as well as the treatment of cases with the disease ophthalmia neonatorum. The Council requested all societies, organizations and local authorities which were concerned with maternity and child welfare services to make certain that the necessary expert treatment was given, especially to syphilitic and gonorrheal expectant mothers and affected newly born babies. It was also decided to bring the matter to the attention of the National Council for Child Welfare and the Departement of Health. The latter was requested to launch a campaign in connection with the proper care of the eyes of newly born infants.

Thus we find, even at the first meeting of the Council, an urgent involvement with one aspect of the prevention of blindness which later would become one of the most important facets of the National Council's activities. We also meet with the initial effort to seek contact with the Department of Health, with which the Council would work closely throughout the years, especially after the establishment of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.

All other matters which were discussed at the meeting were referred to the Executive Committee for further attention.

After resolutions had been passed concerning the signing of cheques, documents and contracts as required by the bank and the law, the meeting adjourned.

In this chapter the available sources were consulted to sketch the events which led up to the foundation of the South African National Council for the Blind. One gets the impression from the discussions which took place at the meetings and the documents which resulted from them that the persons concerned possessed a thorough background and knowledge of the matters which had to be dealt with. The group of people involved in the work of the Council, namely Adv. Bowen, Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, Mr (later Dr) Biesenbach, Miss Josie Wood and Rev (later Dr) A. W. Blaxall, for many years after the establishment of the Council remained closely connected with it and all of them dedicated their lives to the service of the blind. At the time of the establishment of the Council they were already well conversant with most facets of blind welfare work and were thus no new-comers to the field. Dr Van Schalkwijk had already been abroad where he had made a study of the various aspects of disability, physical as well as mental.

For many years he was inspector of special education, was acquainted with the literature and could be regarded as an authority in this field. Advocate Bowen was made aware of the urgency for rehabilitation for the blind through St Dunstan's which, under the leadership of persons such as Sir Arthur Pearson and Captain (later Lord) Fraser, became the leading international organization for the blind. Mr Biesenbach had just returned from abroad where he had undertaken a comprehensive study tour in connection with the education and employment of the blind. Dr Blaxall had extensive experience of blind welfare work in Britain. Miss Josie Wood had already been occupied for ten years with her work at the lending library for the blind, but did not confine herself to that alone. She also concerned herself with the lot of the many blind people in South Africa who led a difficult life. It is thus no wonder that the Council was destined to go from strength to strength, as can be proved by the activities of the Executive Committee which held no fewer than seven meetings during the two years between the first and second meeting of the Council. The next chapter will be devoted to the period immediately following. It will include a resumé of the preliminary work for legislation which resulted in the passing of the Blind Person's Act by Parliament in 1936.

<sup>1</sup> Pamphlet: Care of South Africa's Blind, by the Rev. A. W. Blaxall.

<sup>2</sup> This is an error. The date should be 1929.

<sup>3</sup> Blaxall, A. W.: *Blindness his Servant*, published by the S.A. National Council for the Blind, Pretoria, 1949. Page 16.

<sup>4</sup> Quotation from a memorandum which Dr Blaxall wrote in connection with the foundation of a "Founders' Trust" which was established on his recommendation in 1970 in memory of the founders of the National Council in 1929.

<sup>5</sup> From the minutes of the second conference held in Cape Town in March 1929.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum of Dr Blaxall with regard to the establishment of "Founders' Trust", 1970.

<sup>7</sup> Blaxall, A. W.: *Care of South Africa's Blind*, published in 1929 by the S.A. National Council for the Blind, Cape Town. This contains a report of the proceedings of the Bloemfontein conference. Most of the information which follows was obtained from this report.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of 2nd December 1931, page 5.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum by Dr Blaxall about the establishment of a "Founders' Trust", written in August 1970, page 3.

<sup>10</sup> Blaxall: Care of South Africa's Blind.

<sup>11</sup> The Athlone School for Blind Children had been in existence since 1927.

<sup>12</sup> Watson, M. T.: *Kindly Light*, published by the writer, page 36.

<sup>13</sup> Report of Conference held 22 June 1928, page 11.

<sup>14</sup> Later it was changed to: Our Blind Day.

<sup>15</sup> It is to be understood that Dr Gie would have a special interest in efforts for the furtherance of the cause of the blind. According to Dr Biesenbach (quoted before) Dr Gie's father and mother had been house master and matron of the hostel for blind boys at Worcester from 1897-1910. Dr Gie who was their youngest son, spent his boyhood years among the blind boys.

<sup>16</sup> The names of the organizations are given precisely as they are recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

<sup>17</sup> Today these organizations are known as associate members of the Council. They are organizations which, besides their normal functions, are also concerned with the care of the blind.

<sup>18</sup> N.I.B. stands for National Institute for the Blind, a large and important organization with its headquarters in London. Some years ago the name was changed to the Royal National Institute for the Blind (R.N.I.B.).

## CHAPTER 3

### EARLY YEARS AND LEGISLATION 1929 TO 1936

IT is evident from the resolutions which were taken at the Conference in Cape Town and afterwards at the foundation meeting, that the S.A. National Council for the Blind had set itself a formidable and all-embracing task. The resolutions covered a wide spectrum of services to the blind. One can fully understand this, considering that there was an immense backlog which had to be made up. The Executive Committee, to which many of the resolutions were referred, realised however, that its first priority should be administrative. An office had to be set up and equipped and administrative personnel appointed. Linked with this was the question of fundraising. No organization of any size can function properly without the assurance of having sufficient funds.

The first task was the appointment of a secretary. The Chairman was given the sole right to do this. The Rev. A. W. Blaxall was offered the post but he declined, although he agreed to do the secretarial work up to the end of April 1929, thus for slightly more than a month. In the mean time Adv. Bowen as Chairman obtained the services of Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith in a temporary capacity. It should be mentioned here that the S.A. National Council for the Deaf was also established at that time and the two Councils shared an office with Mr Prescott-Smith as the temporary secretary of both. The office was situated in the building of the Yorkshire Assurance Company, 38 Strand Street, Cape Town. Mr Prescott-Smith had formerly been a teacher at the well known South African College School (S.A.C.S.) in Cape Town.

It may be interesting to mention here that Mr Blaxall had also played the leading role in connection with the founding of the S.A. National Council for the Deaf. The two preliminary conferences were held during the same weekend in Bloemfontein, the conference in connection with the blind on Friday, 22 June 1928, and that in connection with the deaf on Monday, 25 June 1928. The S.A. National Council for the Deaf resolved that its head office would also be situated in Cape



Town. The fact that Mr Blaxall was voted to the chair and thus was intimately concerned with both Councils may have been the reason for having a joint office in Cape Town with one secretary. Probably the need to economise by sharing the expenses was an important factor.

The first reference to a joint office is found in the minutes of the third meeting of the Executive Committee of the S.A. National Council for the Blind when it was decided to separate the offices. The meeting was held on 6 March 1930 in Cape Town and the following resolution was adopted:

“Separation of the two National Councils.

The Secretary pointed out that the work of the Council had increased to such an extent and kept on increasing that it was impossible to keep the two Councils going under one secretary and typist . . . It was proposed and agreed that the two Councils be separated and that the Chairman and the Secretary be asked to negotiate with the Chairman of the National Council for the Deaf with regard to separating the administrative work of the two Councils.”

In later minutes it was reported that the National Council for the Blind has taken over the office equipment from the National Council for the Deaf.

Mr Prescott-Smith acted as temporary secretary of the Council for four years. He probably received an honorarium, for in the financial statement the following was entered under items of expenditure: Salaries and honoraria.

He also ran a business agency which was administered from another office in the same building. At a meeting held on 2 July 1930 the Executive resolved, on the proposal of Mr Prescott-Smith, to hire an office on the same floor in Yorkshire House where his office was situated. Naturally this was a convenient arrangement for him. Meetings were often held in his office, and the present writer still remembers the unexpressed dissatisfaction of some of the members at meeting here, considering that the advertisement on the pane in the door described the kind of business for which Mr Prescott-Smith was the agent! When he was permanently appointed after four years, he gave up the agency and moved into the office of the Council. The resolution in regard to this was taken at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 5 July 1933. The paragraph from the minutes reads as follows:

“That Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith be asked to accept the post of full-

time Organising Secretary, being available to organise wherever desired by the Executive at a salary of £500 (R1000) per annum plus travelling expenses."

It is clear that besides other duties, it was expected of the Organising Secretary to do liaison work, which included the organising of street collections throughout the country.

As has been mentioned before, seven meetings of the Executive Committee were held between the foundation meeting of the Council in March 1929 and the first biennial meeting in March 1931.

A feature of the minutes of those meetings was the full account of the discussions which took place before a resolution was adopted. This gives a clear picture of the trends of thought of the various members, which were at times responsible for serious differences of opinion. Credit for these complete records must be given to Mr. Prescott-Smith.

At practically all these meetings the financial aspect dominated the discussions. The main source of income of the Council was the street collections which were held throughout the country. A rather controversial point of discussion was the disbursement of funds collected in the large centres and areas where societies were operating. It was especially the Johannesburg Society which refused to give up a percentage of their annual collection to head office in connection with the Our Blind Day effort, in spite of the fact that it had been resolved by the Executive Committee that 50 per cent was due to the Council. The procedure to which had been agreed was that the full amount should be sent to head office and then application could be made for a refund of 50 per cent of the amount. In addition to this any organization which dealt with the blind, or had a project in prospect, was free to apply for a grant or a loan from Council.

Mrs Nowlan, however, who served on the Executive Committee and was Chairman of the Johannesburg Society, was adamant. In this regard the minutes reported as follows:

"Mrs Nowlan stated that she felt it would be quite just and they were fully prepared to pay their share of the office expenses of the National Council but she objected to having to send the full amount collected to the National Council and leaving to the discretion of the Executive the amount that should be refunded."<sup>1</sup>

The Secretary gave a full statement on the collections. This included a list of the towns and cities in each province where the collections were held with the amounts collected. Even the names of the persons

who organised them were carefully tabulated. There was also a column in which the centres were listed where permission was granted but where collections were not held, as well as the centres where permission was refused. The latter received special attention in due course either through postal reminders or personal visits by the Organising Secretary. In this way then, the foundation was laid for a system of fundraising for the Council.

The problem of local as against national fundraising would in later years become greater in relation to the expansion of the work of the various organisations, and the responsibilities of the National Council. In defence of the Johannesburg Society it can be mentioned that they were engaged in raising funds for a workshop with an administration block and the development of social services to individuals and their families. But then also the National Council had to become strong enough financially not only to keep the office going, but also to launch essential projects of national scope and to assist societies when called upon.

As more towns allowed collections to be held, and the organisation was stepped up, the financial position of the Council improved, since hardly any requests for refunds from this source were forthcoming. It is however understandable that the larger sums were collected in the cities where active organisations for the blind existed. In this connection it must be mentioned that no state subsidies for societies were as yet available. (The Council itself received a state subsidy of only £125 (R250) for 1929).

The importance of Our Blind Day was heavily stressed at every meeting of the Executive Committee during the early years. Besides being an occasion for fundraising the day also had to be used to make blindness and the Council known everywhere in the country. The value of public relations was then already realised.

The Secretary brought forward several suggestions to accomplish this but he himself felt that his staff would not be able to cope with the situation at the time.

The minutes reported as follows:<sup>2</sup>

"He (the Secretary) stated that he felt "Our Blind Day" would be a propitious time to commence this work though he feared it might submerge the present staff. The meeting felt that, desirable as the Secretary's suggestion was, it would be inadvisable to clog the organisation by taking on too much work at once. The matter

was therefore allowed to stand over."

It shows however the keenness with which the Secretary wished to tackle the work, and this must be mentioned to his credit. His enthusiasm is clearly shown in the minutes of all the meetings.

Although the income of the Council in the first year of its existence was comparatively low, the Executive Committee decided to grant financial aid where circumstances warranted it. Thus at the meeting of 6 March 1930, the following grants were made:

£100 (R200) to the Worcester School for the Blind

£100 (R200) to the Athlone School for the Blind

£50 (R100) to the S.A. Library for the Blind.

At the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 4 December 1930, a letter from the Johannesburg Society was submitted in which application for a grant ("a free gift") of £100 (R200) was made to enable a blind person to be sent overseas to be trained as a masseur. It was resolved that an interest-free loan would be granted to the Society.<sup>3</sup>

At the same meeting an amount of £200 (R400) was granted to the Rev. A. W. Blaxall to supplement a bursary which he had received from the Carnegie Corporation in order to visit the United States of America. Apart from attending an international conference on various aspects of blindness he would also visit institutions. It is quite remarkable that the Council already realised in the second year of its existence the value of overseas visits and that it granted money for it, a policy which has been maintained up to the present day.

A matter which was discussed right at the beginning of the first meeting of the Executive Committee was the aims and functions of the Council. It was repeatedly stressed that the Council would merely act in a co-ordinating capacity, and would not interfere with the activities of societies or other organizations for the blind. This was stressed in a motion which was introduced by Dr L. van Schalkwijk. Probably this matter was brought up as a result of the hesitancy of two societies to affiliate to the Council. One was the Society for the Welfare of the Blind in the Orange Free State and the other was the Durban Society.

As regards the Free State Society, it appears that the reluctance firstly concerned fund-raising, secondly the autonomy of the Society, and lastly the request to the Council that the Society be acknowledged as the sole organization for the blind in the Orange Free State. The Society wished to be considered a provincial organization and desired to



get the assurance from the National Council that the Council would not acknowledge any other organisation which might be established for the blind in the province in the future, and would not allow its affiliation to the Council.

As regards the first two matters, the Executive Committee was able to give the Society the necessary assurance. Concerning the last the view of the Executive Committee was stated as follows:<sup>4</sup>

“So far as the National Council is concerned, it places no significance on the name the Society elects to call itself, but if they wish to set themselves up as a Provincial Organisation and limit the right of the National Council to deal with any other Society which may be formed in the O. F. S. and endeavour to prevent that Society from affiliating to the National Council, then the National Council must object.”

It was then resolved that the Secretary should travel to Bloemfontein in order to interview the Committee of the Free State Society. This interview had the desired result. At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council held on 4 December 1930, the application of the Free State Society for affiliation was granted.

The refusal of the Durban Society (Our Own Blind Fund Association) to affiliate was discussed at several meetings of the Executive Committee. At a meeting on 6 March 1930<sup>5</sup> the Chairman presented a report on the interview which he had had with members of the Committee of the Durban Society. It appeared that they were worried about the appropriation of a sum of money which they had collected. The minutes state:

“The Chairman reported that he had interviewed the Durban Society but that with a vote of 5 against 2 their committee had definitely resolved not to affiliate. The reason for Durban refusing to affiliate seems to be their jealousy in safeguarding a special fund of £5 000 which had been raised in the Union for the establishment of a national industry for the blind.”

The minutes mention nothing further, but it is probable that the Durban Committee did not understand the co-ordinating function of the Council, which implied that if a society affiliated it would remain fully autonomous and no moneys need be paid over to the Council.

Our Own Blind Fund Association of Natal affiliated to the National Council on 14 September, 1936, and sent a representative to the fourth

biennial meeting of the Council, which was held in Port Elizabeth in 1937. She was Mrs C. Cawston.

### **Compulsory Education**

Another pertinent question which held the attention of the Council during that time was compulsory education for blind children. Already at the first conference the urgency of the matter had been stressed by Mrs G. K. Nowlan and Dr L. van Schalkwijk.<sup>6</sup>

Later on the matter was raised on various occasions, and it was resolved, in co-operation with the S. A. National Council for the Deaf, to interview the Minister of Education — firstly Dr D. F. Malan and later Mr J. H. Hofmeyr — regarding legislation for the introduction of compulsory education for both blind and deaf children. Dr L. van Schalkwijk and Dr P. E. Biesenbach played a leading role in this. Adv. R. W. Bowen also had a hand in these representations.

The Special Schools Amendment Act, 1937 (Act No. 43 of 1937) was ultimately passed by Parliament. "It made provision for compulsory education for all white children of school going age who, on account of one or other physical, mental or behaviour disability, or deficiency, were not able to benefit sufficiently from education which is provided at ordinary schools."<sup>7</sup>

The above Act is an amendment to the first Act which was passed regarding special education, namely the Vocational and Special Education Act, 1928 (Act no. 21 of 1928).

With regard to the education of blind children, the question of secondary education was discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 6 March, 1930.<sup>8</sup> A request had come from a blind individual to establish a secondary school up to matriculation. The Rev. A. W. Blaxall investigated the matter and submitted a report. The following quotation from the minutes is significant, and reflects the opinion which prevailed at that time regarding secondary education for the blind in South Africa:

"The Government has not yet been convinced that there is a demand for secondary education in South Africa. It even considers that at this stage secondary education for the blind does not seem very desirable. The Government desires to concentrate on primary education. Dr Van Schalkwijk stated that he knew of only two instances where blind pupils had written for the Matric, and until there is a demand for more pupils for a secondary course, there is no need for the establishment of a secondary school for

the blind. It might be possible, if one or two students desired higher education, for the National Council or the Government to subsidise them to go to England for such education."

To understand the above point of view to some extent, one must take into consideration the fact that the academic qualifications for further study in, for example, physiotherapy (then known as massage) and certain advanced music examinations, were much lower than today. Whereas the qualification for the abovementioned courses is matriculation today, the requirement was only Std VII at that time. It has been mentioned that the small numbers were an important consideration. Yet it is almost inconceivable that matriculation for blind pupils was considered undesirable.

It is not correct, however, to say that the Government's objective was to concentrate on primary work. In 1930, when the resolution in question was passed Std VII had already been introduced long since. Furthermore the school course was extended to Std VIII in 1931. In this connection it should be mentioned that shortly after the introduction of the Std VIII course at Worcester, the extension to matriculation had already been considered. The matriculation course, however, was only introduced in 1943, whereupon university studies followed almost immediately.

### **Prevention of Blindness**

A matter with which the Council actively concerned itself from the outset, was the prevention of blindness. Not only was it laid down in the constitution as one of the Council's objectives, but already at the conference in Cape Town which preceded the foundation of the Council, both Dr L. van Schalkwijk and Mrs G. K. Nowlan touched on the matter. In the first biennial report of the Council the Chairman, Advocate R. W. Bowen, devoted a great deal of space to the causes and prevention of blindness, laying special emphasis on the urgency of effective care of the eyes of the newborn child.<sup>9</sup>

At the first meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, held on 20 to 21 March 1929, a resolution was passed whereby all organizations, societies and local authorities who were concerned with obstetrics and/or child welfare services were urgently requested to ensure that:

- (a) provision was made for specialist maternity services;
- (b) information to expectant mothers was provided concerning the care of the eyes of the newborn infant;

(c) specialised treatment was provided in all cases of ophthalmia neonatorum.

The latter eye disease, commonly called sore eyes in babies, had caused blindness in many infants, and to combat this, regulations in terms of the Public Health Act, 1928 (Act no. 15 of 1928) were published by which it was made compulsory to apply a prophylactic corrective to the eyes of the newborn infant.<sup>10</sup>

In this connection the Council adopted the following motion at its biennial meeting of 10-12 March 1931:

“That in view of the fact that the compulsory use of a 1% solution of silver nitrate in the eyes of the newborn child, immediately after birth, has proved so effective in the U.S.A., Canada and Scotland in the prevention of blindness, this National Council for the Blind urges that the use of this prophylactic be similarly made compulsory in this country.”

The resolution was sent to various medical bodies and local and provincial authorities.

Today ophthalmia neonatorum is virtually an unknown disease owing to the application of new remedies which have been discovered by medical science in later years.

At the seventh meeting of the Executive Committee held on 13 March, 1931 (directly after the first biennial meeting of the Council) it was resolved to apply for affiliation to the “International Association for the Prevention of Blindness” which was founded in The Hague in 1929.

It thus appears that the preventive work initially consisted of information to the public and representations to the authorities in connection with the provision of services for nursing and care, especially at the birth of children. The provincial education departments were urged to recognise the necessity of systematic eye examinations for all school children.<sup>11</sup>

In connection with the dissemination of information concerning the prevention of blindness, the Executive Committee imported a film from America in 1934, titled *Prevention of Blindness and Saving Sight*, made by the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, New York, U.S.A. The film was apparently widely shown, as mentioned in the Third Biennial Report (1933-1934):

“This film was shown at well attended public meetings in



Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Isipingo Beach. At each meeting the Chairman gave an address on Council's work, being supported at Johannesburg, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth by Dr Van Schalkwijk and at Bloemfontein by Mr Biesenbach."<sup>12</sup>

The report further mentions that the Executive Committee investigated the possibility of producing a film of its own, but the expense proved to be too great.

A matter which the National Council introduced and which resulted in an investigation at governmental level, was the unrestricted sale of spectacles by shops and itinerant salesmen. This practice gradually ceased as better control was exercised. It can indeed be said that the National Council had made a considerable contribution in bringing this about.

A part of the resolution which was taken at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 4 December, 1933, reads as follows:

"The S.A. National Council for the Blind views with deep concern the apparent indifference with which the general public approaches the important subject of sight preservation, and it feels that the prevailing economic and industrial conditions call for the greatest vigilance in a matter of this kind.

"Especially does it deplore the fact that many stores throughout the country, as well as travelling salesmen, are permitted to sell, in large quantities, very cheap, ill-adjusted and ill-fitting spectacles to the public, with little or no regard to and without knowledge of the varying conditions of eye-sight."

The resolution was sent to the Department of Public Health and it met with a response in the report of the Department for the year ended 30 June 1934. The Secretary for Public Health stated:

"It is becoming increasingly evident that serious damage may result to the eye-sight of the public by the unsupervised sale of spectacles . . . Salesmen travel round farms informing people that they have serious eye-defects and selling them spectacles at ridiculously high prices."<sup>13</sup>

The report of the Department goes further by stating that investigation had already been made to bring the matter into the open. The Federal Council of Medical Societies was requested to make suggestions regarding the matter.<sup>14</sup>

The initial efforts of the National Council to prevent blindness must

be seen in the light of the circumstances which prevailed at that time. Many of the problems do not exist today, but the Council had its share in the elimination or solving of the problems. Therefore it must be accepted that, since the beginning of its existence, the Council was an effective force in this field, which could even give direction to State departments and which could exert sufficient influence to eliminate malpractices through instructions, regulations and even legislation by the State.

It seems as if the passing by Parliament of the Blind Persons' Act, 1936 (Act no. 11 of 1936) gave momentum to the whole question of the prevention of blindness.

### **Publicity**

From its foundation the Council not only exerted itself to publicise its own activities but it was also responsible for the dissemination of information about blindness, of which the general public had a rather slanted image.

Much attention to publicity had already been given in the first biennial report of 1929-1930. It seemed as if the best time for publicity would be around Our Blind Day. For this the assistance of the press should be enlisted and we read the following in the minutes of the third meeting of the Executive Committee:

"It was resolved that the Council will have to work up propaganda in every newspaper in the Union to be published on five consecutive days prior to the first Saturday in May."<sup>15</sup>

It was also the custom to request a public figure to deliver an appropriate message. In this way the Earl of Clarendon, Governor-General of the Union at that time and Patron of the National Council, had released a press message for Our Blind Day in 1934, and Mr J. H. Hofmeyr, then Minister of Union Education, had delivered a message for 1935. Both these messages were broadcast. In the message of the Earl of Clarendon much emphasis was placed on the prevention of blindness, especially in the case of infants. Mr Hofmeyr made a pronouncement which was still quoted long afterwards on various occasions. It read as follows:

"One of the most effective tests of the standard of a nation's civilisation is the provision it makes for the weak and helpless in its midst. A nation which leaves neglected and uncared for those who are deprived of sight, cannot itself look other civilised nations in the face."<sup>16</sup>

Besides the propaganda which was made on the occasion of Our Blind Day, the Organising Secretary (Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith) himself supplied quite a number of articles to the press about the work done by the National Council. In connection with this the following paragraph appears in the minutes of the Executive Committee of 4 December, 1933:<sup>17</sup>

“The Secretary laid on the table copies of the various articles he had written in English and in Afrikaans to the South African press since the last meeting of the Executive. He also placed before members a press cutting book<sup>18</sup> showing cuttings from a selected number of newspapers and containing leading articles from several representative papers.”

If one considers that the staff at that time consisted only of the Organising Secretary and one typist, it is praiseworthy that so much propaganda material could have come out of the office.

The first three pamphlets which were distributed were drafted by Mrs I. J. Lawrence, then teacher-in-charge at the Athlone School for the Blind. The subjects which were decided upon, were the following:<sup>19</sup>

Prevention of Blindness

The Care of the Blind Infant

The Blind Child in the Holidays.

It was resolved that an ophthalmic surgeon be requested to scrutinize the contents of the first, and Messrs Blaxall and Biesenbach and Dr. Van Schalkwijk those of the other two. The pamphlets would appear in both languages.

It was later reported that the following pamphlets had been printed and distributed (in both official languages):

No. 1 Save the Eyes and Sight;

No. 2 The Problem of the Partially Sighted Child;

No. 3 The Blind Child in the Home<sup>20</sup>

## Employment

Although there were previous references to the desirability of the integration of the blind in open labour, we find that the first positive resolution concerning the employment of blind persons was taken at the second biennial meeting of Council held in April 1933. It reads as follows:

“That the Executive be asked to initiate an enquiry and to take

further steps which may be considered necessary to extend the avenues of employment of Blind Persons.”<sup>21</sup>

This was followed by an in-depth discussion by the Executive Committee at its meeting of 4 July 1933. The Organising Secretary reported on investigations he had made regarding placement possibilities in conjunction with the Department of Labour. He had also carefully scrutinised the various Labour Acts for possible obstacles to be encountered in connection with the employment of blind persons in factories.

Before we proceed to deal with the question of placement in open labour, it is necessary to point out that before the establishment of the Council in 1929, there were already a fair number of piano tuners, organists, music teachers and cane workers in competitive labour. Most of these had received their training at the Worcester School for the Blind. However, only a few factory workers had been placed during that period. Miss Lennox Rawbone of Cape Town informed the writer that at the time when a beginning was made to establish the Cape Town Society (round about 1928) she had placed two blind girls in jobs, one in a shirt factory and the other with a packaging firm in Cape Town. We also know that practically all the basketmakers and mattress makers who had been trained at Worcester during those years had to make their own livelihood, and some of them were highly successful.

Here the masseurs (forerunners of the physiotherapists) must also be mentioned. Their circumstances and status were discussed at several meetings of the Council and the Executive Committee.

The first reference is found in the minutes of the second biennial meeting of the Council of 10-11 April, 1933. Apparently problems arose with the appointment of masseurs in hospitals. The following proposal by Dr. Van Schalkwijk was approved:

“That it be an instruction to the Executive to take whatever steps are considered necessary in its discretion, to ensure that blind masseurs who are candidates for positions at hospitals, should not be penalised because they happen to be blind.”

Arising from this the Executive Committee resolved:

“That a delegation should interview the Minister of Health and the Medical Board with regard to the employment of blind masseurs in hospitals in the Union.”<sup>22</sup>

The result of this interview is not reported but probably it had the desired effect since at the next meeting of the Executive Committee,



held on 4 December, 1933, the Chairman stated:

"that there were 11 or 12 blind masseurs practising in the Union at the present time. Five or six had definite full-time hospital employment, the rest were in private practice . . ."

However, he warned that:

"unless a blind masseur had a fairly satisfactory financial backing or a hospital appointment the prospects of his making good were problematical."<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Van Schalkwijk further remarked that masseurs should still be encouraged to go abroad for training if they could find the money. The latter remark is meaningful. Quite a number of the more or less twelve masseurs of whom mention was made, were ex-soldiers, who had been provided with the necessary funds for their training in England by the St Dunstan's organization. The civilian blind of that time had to find their own funds as no bursaries or other assistance was available as is the case today.

From the minutes and other records one gains the impression that the placement of blind persons in open labour could not gain momentum and that the matter went no further than general discussions and enquiries about possible channels of employment. There were no purposeful efforts to convince employers of the potential of blind people or to place them.

After long discussions about the matter one would at least expect a firm resolution which would lead to action, but there was merely a pious declaration of intention to continue with efforts for placing blind persons in industry. The wording was as follows:

"It was agreed to continue our efforts to secure the employment of as many blind persons as possible in the various trades and industries as an incentive to all employers to employ at least one or two blind workers."<sup>24</sup>

Besides praiseworthy but sporadic efforts by societies the National Council's contribution to the problem consisted mostly of proposals, statements of policy and resolutions which did not develop into deeds. There is no doubt that each member of the Executive Committee and the Council as such was concerned about the state of affairs, but nobody came forward with a *modus operandi* which would guarantee any success.

A very possible reason was the inability of the Organising Secretary to set aside time for this specialised and time-consuming work in the

midst of his many administrative duties. For this an employment officer should have been appointed. This, however, would only take place twenty years later.

The matter of employment received scant attention during the following years and it was only at the eighth biennial meeting, held in November 1946, that serious efforts were made which eventually resulted in the appointment of an employment committee and much later of an employment officer.

### **Gaps in the Provision of Services**

The question of aid to the blind in remote regions of the country which fell beyond the service area of existing societies had received the attention of the Council since its foundation.

It is understandable that the work of the Council should have become known even in the most remote parts of the country on account of the street collections which were held. Thus we find that in the minutes of the Executive Committee mention is made of applications by individual blind people from places such as Kakamas, Murraysburg, Pniël (a mission station near Stellenbosch), Moorreesburg, Queenstown, Kestell, Parys, etc. These applications came directly to head office. It was often not possible to refer these cases to existing societies for the blind.

Sometimes it happened that a local welfare organization accepted responsibility to help a blind person. Thus we find that the Queenstown Ladies' Benevolent Society applied for a sum of R20 on behalf of a blind woman. The application was made on the strength of the fact that during the previous two years R150 had been collected in Queenstown for the Council. This was granted, and was repeated later on. On another occasion a grant of R20 was made to a mattress maker through the mediation of the Vroue Sendingbond.

On various occasions the Council and the Executive Committee stressed that the National Council was a co-ordinating body, and therefore could not deal with individuals. The affiliated societies for the blind should provide for their needs and if financial aid was required from the Council this should be applied for by the affiliated societies. Later on the assistance of associate bodies was also enlisted. In connection with the whole matter a detailed resolution was taken at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 2 December 1931. It is given in full as it must be considered as the stated policy of the

National Council at the time:

"The Executive Committee of the S.A. National Council for the Blind wishes to draw the attention of all Affiliated and Associated Societies to the fact that the National Council cannot deal with individuals who are in need of help, but where there has been an annual collection in a particular village or area for the National Council then one of the Affiliated Societies or the local branch of that Society, or a local branch of an Associated Society may apply to the National Council for a refund of part of the monies collected in that area. Such an application must be accompanied by a definite statement as to the number and the needs of the blind in that area.

The interest of our blind people, especially those who do not reside within the working area of a Civilian Blind Society can best be served by co-operation between the National Council and the Associated Society of that area."<sup>25</sup>

A shortcoming in the resolution seems to be that financial aid could only be granted in places and areas where collections for the Council were held. This would surely curtail the services to the blind, and must be regarded as unfair, considering that the blind individual who needs help urgently cannot be held responsible for the organising or otherwise of a collection in the area where he lives.

The fact that it became clear that the services for the blind were not wide-spread enough must surely be regarded as one of the reasons why small societies came into being in different parts of the country at that time, namely at Graaff-Reinet, Oudtshoorn, Stellenbosch, Brakpan and Bellville-Durbanville. Efforts were even made to establish a society or committee at Ladysmith, Natal. All the above societies were dissolved in course of time. It is also noteworthy that the Executive Committee resolved at one of its meetings to request the societies to appoint "outpost officers" to serve blind persons in remote areas.<sup>26</sup>

The problem of reaching all blind people in need of aid was thus a subject of debate from the early days onwards. Yet it has remained with us until today.

## Legislation

The passing of the Blind Persons Act, 1936 (Act No. 11 of 1936) must surely be considered to be the most important event in the history of the blind in South Africa. Not only did it provide for material aid to

individuals and organizations, but it served as an impetus for all who worked for the welfare of the blind both nationally and locally. No wonder therefore that immediately after legislation was passed the activities of the Council were considerably extended. This must be seen as the result of the responsibilities and duties which were assigned to the Council by the Act, at the same time creating a link between State departments and the Council.

Special legislation for the promotion of services to the blind had already occupied the attention of the S.A. National Council for the Blind since its foundation. In fact a clause in the constitution enjoins the Council: "to take such steps as may be necessary for securing the proper administration of all Acts of Parliament and Ordinances dealing with the Blind, and to promote any legislation that may be considered necessary for the general welfare of the Blind."<sup>27</sup>

The first official reference to legislation is found in the first Biennial Report of the Council (1929 - 1930). In Section 7 of the report the Chairman states that legislation for the blind in South Africa, such as existed in countries abroad, had become exceedingly urgent, and he expressed the hope that the Government would introduce such legislation. In the meantime the Council was doing everything possible to promote legislation on the basis of the Blind Persons Act of England, which had been in force since 1920.

When the Report was discussed at the first biennial meeting of the Council in March 1931, Dr L. van Schalkwijk proposed that the Executive Committee be instructed to investigate the matter.<sup>28</sup>

At the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 13 March 1931, directly after the first biennial meeting, a sub-committee was appointed to draft legislation for the blind. The Committee comprised the following:<sup>29</sup>

Adv. R. W. Bowen

Ds P. J. Perold<sup>30</sup>

Dr L. van Schalkwijk

Mr P. E. Biesenbach

Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith.

It was further resolved to await the return of Mr Blaxall from America, where he had been attending an international conference on blindness, before starting with the work.

At the second biennial meeting of Council, held in April 1933, Dr Van Schalkwijk submitted a report on the progress the sub-committee



had made with regard to the matter. It recommended that the Council request the Government to appoint a parliamentary commission which would investigate all aspects of blind care with a view to legislation. The relevant proposal read as follows:

“That the National Council for the Blind is convinced of the necessity for legislation to deal with the many and varying aspects of the blind problem in the Union, and most respectfully appeals to Parliament to institute a Commission to investigate the problem of Blind Care in all its aspects and thereafter to submit recommendations to Parliament, with a view to legislation to relieve the needs of the Blind and to help them in their grievous handicap.”<sup>31</sup>

After this was approved Dr Van Schalkwijk recommended that the Executive committee be instructed to compile all the necessary data which would be needed for the drafting of the Bill.

Acting on this the Executive Committee decided to appoint a deputation<sup>32</sup> to interview the Minister of the Interior so as to advocate the appointment of a Parliamentary Commission. The deputation comprised Adv. R. W. Bowen, M. P., Mrs Deneys Reitz, M. P., Dr Karl Bremer, M.P., Adv. S. le Roux, M.P., Dr Hugh Stayt and the Organising Secretary of the Council. The interview took place on 17 June 1933. Adv. Bowen stated the case of the Council and gave an exposition of the most important aspects of services to the blind. He thereafter stressed the indispensability of State aid by means of legislation.

The Minister however stated that he was not convinced of the necessity of a Parliamentary Commission as the first step to an investigation. He requested the National Council to submit a memorandum which should include full details of what was being done in other countries, as well as an exposition of the chief aspects regarding legislation for the blind in South Africa.

The secretariat immediately drew up a memorandum concerning all aspects of services to and the care of the blind. It contained the following:

- (1) Number and distribution of the blind in South Africa;
- (2) Provision of braille literature;
- (3) Definition of blindness;
- (4) Wages and augmentation allowances for blind workers;
- (5) The unemployable and indigent blind pension schemes in other countries;

- (6) State Commissions for the Blind in the U.S.A.;
- (7) Recommendations of the New Zealand Commission of Enquiry into Blind Welfare, 1923.

It thus appears that the Secretary had made a thorough study of all aspects of blindness. To obtain certain information, circulars were sent to all affiliated bodies, including schools. The reaction was exceedingly good.

Within five months after the interview with the Minister, at the beginning of November 1933, the memorandum and annexures were sent to the Minister, and on 20 November the Chairman and the Organising Secretary were summoned for an interview in Pretoria. The Minister expressed his satisfaction concerning the content of the memorandum, as it gave a complete picture of the special circumstances of the blind in South Africa. The Minister however informed the deputation that he preferred to wait for the report of the Provincial Finance Commission before proceeding with the matter. Meanwhile he agreed to appoint an Interdepartmental Committee of Inquiry to investigate the welfare of the blind in the country. This committee consisted of the Under-Secretary for the Interior, the Under-Secretary for Labour and the Organising Inspector of Union Education.<sup>33</sup>

Copies of the Council's memorandum were sent to the Interdepartmental Committee and on 22 June 1934 the Executive Committee had an interview with the Committee in Bloemfontein. Various aspects of the memorandum were discussed, including the question of reliable statistics. It was decided to take the schools as basis, and to make the calculations from there. The census figures of 1911 and 1918 would also serve as guidelines.

The Organising Secretary returned to Cape Town and immediately began to compile the necessary statistics which would be put at the disposal of the Interdepartmental Committee. Thereafter the responsible officers of the Department of Labour and Social Welfare (which were combined in one department at that time) drafted a Bill in collaboration with the Sub-committee for Legislation of the S.A. National Council for the Blind "to provide for the payment of pensions to blind persons, and of grants-in-aid for the promotion of the welfare of such persons and for matters incidental thereto."<sup>34</sup>

The course of the Bill through all its stages in the House of Assembly and the Senate in the record time of two days, by waiving several traditional parliamentary procedures, is an interesting piece of history.

The Bill was published on 26 February 1936 and was read in the House of Assembly for the first time on 9 March 1936. The second reading appeared on the order paper of 26 March. This was a Thursday afternoon. It so happened that the following Monday (30 March) was scheduled for the debate on the Prime Minister's Native Bill which would occupy all the time up to the beginning of the Easter recess on 20 April. If the Blind Persons Act was not passed before that time the danger existed that it would have to be held over for a year until the following session. It was urgent that the Bill should be disposed of as Friday 27 March had been set aside as private member's day. It was problematic whether any private member could be found to forgo the time allotted to him for the finalising of the Bill.

Reading the Bill, which was a government measure, the second time, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Mr A. P. J. Fourie, paid tribute to the work done by voluntary organizations in the interests of the blind. He requested members to be helpful so that the second reading, the committee stage, and the third reading could be completed that afternoon. It was getting late, however, and Advocate Bowen realised that everything would not be concluded before the automatic adjournment at six o' clock. The Speaker overlooked about a dozen members who wished to speak and granted Adv. Bowen a chance to state his case. He requested that an unopposed motion be adopted by the Assembly that the Bill be finalised the following day (Friday) before the private member motions were resumed. The Minister was prepared to introduce such a motion and it was carried. The person who was chiefly affected by this procedure was Dr Hjalmar Reitz, whose private bill concerning accountants would have been first on the order paper.

The Secretary quotes the following from the Cape Argus (possibly that of Saturday 28 March, 1936):

"Dr Hjalmar Reitz who had first place on the order paper gracefully allowed his order to stand over until the Blind Persons Bill had been disposed of — no mean concession when it is remembered how jealously private members fight for their rights and privileges. It seemed for a time as if members were taking an unkind advantage of Dr Reitz's generosity because they debated the committee stage of the Blind Persons Bill much longer than Dr Reitz had been led to expect. Still he made no complaint and eventually with one or two amendments the Bill was reported to

Mr Speaker, and the report stage and the third reading were taken right away. Cheers greeted Mr Fourie, the responsible Minister, as he set out to try his luck with the Senate."

In the Senate the matter was also swiftly dealt with. When the Minister asked permission to introduce the measure, some of the Senators objected in view of the fact that it did not appear on the order paper. However, when they heard what it was about they had a change of heart and immediately proceeded with the first, second and third reading of the Bill. Following this the Minister returned to the Assembly where the Speaker certified the Bill and made it law. The Cape Argus concludes its report thus:

"The whole affair was an extraordinary parliamentary story, but as it was all in a good cause, few cared to count the number of sound old traditional rules which had gone by the board in the telling of it."

The signing of the Act was also an extraordinary occurrence.

While the Executive Committee of the Council was engaged in a meeting at Cape Town on 3 April, 1936, the Chairman (Adv. R. W. Bowen) received a telephone message which invited him to Government House to be present at the occasion of the signing of the Blind Persons Act by the Governor-General. On his return the Chairman announced that the Afrikaans text of the Act had been signed, by which it was officially placed on the statute book of the Union of South Africa, as Act No. 11 of 1936. The Governor-General used a gold fountain pen which had been donated by the American Swiss Watch Company for this purpose.<sup>35</sup>

The date for the promulgation of the Act was set for 1 November 1936, by the Governor-General in pursuance of a notice in the Government Gazette of 2 October 1936. The regulations, published under Clause 12 of the Act, appeared in this same edition.

The great influence which the Act had on the various facets of service to the blind was perceptible immediately after its promulgation. The Act also brought about a better conception of blindness. Therefore it can be stated without contradiction that the Blind Persons Act of 1936 can be considered the most important single event in the history of welfare service to the blind in our country. It enabled the organizations concerned, State departments and even individuals to perform their tasks more purposefully. Besides the greater financial aid which was provided, the Act offered a new approach to the rendering of services



to the blind. In this connection the National Council received certain commissions in regard to its actions, responsibilities and duties.

The major portion of the Act deals with the granting of pensions and the registration of blind persons. A number of clauses follow concerning the registration of societies for the blind, subsidies allocated to such societies and augmentation allowances paid to blind workers in workshops. There is a clause which exempts persons employed in workshops from certain industrial laws. The last three clauses of the Act deal respectively with the right of the Governor-General to issue regulations, definitions of terms and the short title of the Act.

As regards the granting of pensions, the Act lays down that only persons registered as blind are entitled to pensions, subject to certain conditions. In connection with registration it is further stipulated:

- (a) that the person be medically examined so that the degree and nature of his eye condition can be determined;
- (b) that blindness, for the purpose of the examination, be accurately defined;
- (c) that a list of medical practitioners be drawn up by the Minister after consultation with the S.A. Medical Council, in order to carry out the examinations;
- (d) that a register of blind persons be kept.

The procedures which have to be followed are fully set out in the regulations.

The definition of blindness is given in the regulations under the heading:

### **Criteria of Blindness**

As an introduction to the numerical definition of visual acuity, there is a general description of a person who is regarded as blind according to Clause 2 of the Act. It reads as follows:

“A person shall be regarded as a blind person if his acuity of vision is so restricted that he is unable by reason of such restriction to perform any work for which sight is essential.”

This acuity of vision is set forth in detail in paragraph 2(c) of the regulations as follows:

“The medical practitioner shall, for the purpose of determining whether a person is blind, ascertain whether a person falls within any of the following groups:

Group I — Persons with an acuity of vision below 3/60 Snellen:

In general a person with visual acuity below 3/60 Snellen may be regarded as blind.

Group II — Persons with an acuity of vision of 3/60 but below 6/60 Snellen:

A person with visual acuity of 3/60 but less than 6/60 Snellen

(i) may be regarded as blind if the field of vision is reduced to 50 per cent of the normal field of vision with the central portion of the field of vision unimpaired, but

(ii) should not be regarded as blind if the visual defect is of long standing and is unaccompanied by any material contraction of the field of vision, for example, in cases of congenital nystagmus, albinism, myopia, etc.

Group III — Persons with an acuity of vision of 6/60 Snellen or above:

A person with visual acuity of 6/60 Snellen or above shall ordinarily not be regarded as blind, but may be regarded as blind if the field of vision is contracted to 25 per cent of the normal field of vision and if the lower part of the field of vision has been contracted to 50 per cent of its normal dimensions; but a person suffering from homonymous or bi-temporal hemianopia retaining central visual acuity of 6/18 Snellen or above shall not be regarded as blind."

It was stipulated further that the Snellen test should be applied, but in case of doubt further tests should be applied including "testing by means of the ophthalmoscope and the testing of reflex actions".

In the regulations provision was also made for the possible treatment of the eye condition of a person who had been medically examined for registration as a blind person. Clause 4 of the Act describes the conditions which are imposed (besides blindness) for the acquirement of a pension. Such a person must convince the Commissioner of Pensions that —

- (a) he has attained the age of 19 years;
- (b) he is domiciled in the Union;<sup>36</sup>
- (c) he is resident in the Union at the time of making application for the pension;
- (d) he is a Union National or has been ordinarily resident in the Union for 10 out of the 15 years immediately preceding the date of application.

The amount which can be paid out as a pension to a blind person is

not only determined by his own income or personal means, but also according to the ability of his wife or his children to contribute towards his support.

The first section of Clause 5 makes provision for the amounts which can be paid out as pension. Clause 5(1) reads as follows:

"The pension to be granted to any person under this Act shall be of such amount as having regard to the circumstances of such a person, the Commissioner deems reasonable and sufficient, but shall not exceed in the case of —

(a) A white person, the rate of thirty six pounds per annum; or  
(b) a coloured person, the rate of twenty four pounds per annum;  
nor shall it be at such a rate as will make such person's income or means together with the pension exceed -

(i) sixty four pounds per annum in the case of a white person; or  
(ii) forty eight pounds per annum in the case of a coloured person: Provided that in assessing such person's income or means, the Commissioner shall not take into account more than one half of the earnings of such person."

In the present currency the pension would not, in the case of a white person, exceed R72, or R48 per annum in the case of a coloured person. Also the total income of a person, in order to obtain a full pension, may not exceed R128 per annum in the case of a white person, or R96 per annum in the case of a coloured person.

It may be mentioned here that during the committee stage of the Bill in the House of Assembly, members raised objections to the low rates of the pensions to be paid, also to the clause in the Act which stipulated that the income and means of the person's spouse and children should be taken into consideration for the assessment of his pension. The Cape Argus of 27 March 1936 reports the following about this:

"In Clause five of the Bill, Mr Madeley, Labour, Benoni, urged the Minister not to set the deplorably low standard of living involved in the pension of three pounds a month. He was afraid so far from the removing the blind beggars from the streets it would conduce to putting more of them on the charity of the public."<sup>37</sup>

In connection with the clause whereby the income and means of members of the family would be considered, the report continues:

"He (Mr Madeley) had begun to realise that this principle of contributions from relatives was bad and militated against the interests of the beneficiaries. Mr Derbyshire, while he welcomed

the Bill, disliked the disqualifying sub-section which he described as a means test. It was not as if a large number of people were involved in these benefits.’’<sup>38</sup>

The amendment however, as proposed by Mr Madeley, was rejected by the Chairman<sup>38</sup> who gave as a reason that such a measure would raise the expenditure.

Clause 9 of the Act made provision for (a) subsidies to registered societies for the upkeep of “hotels, homes, workshops and other places for the reception or training of persons who are totally or partially blind”, and (b) for augmentation allowances as laid down in the Regulations, on the earnings of persons employed in workshops.

Clause 10 makes provision for the registration of societies.

Clause 8 has direct bearing on the S.A. National Council for the Blind. The clause reads as follows:

“The Council shall, in addition to such powers and duties as it may have under its constitution, have such powers and duties in connection with the promotion of the welfare of persons who are totally or partially blind as may be prescribed by regulation.”

These “powers and duties” are “prescribed” in paragraph 24 of the Regulations, and read as follows:

“The Council shall interest itself generally in the welfare of all blind persons either directly or in collaboration with any other association, institution or person, and shall especially:

- (a) if requested by the Commissioner to do so, arrange for the examination by a medical practitioner of any blind person;
- (b) encourage blind persons to work and whenever this appears to be desirable, arrange for their admission to hostels, homes, workshops or other places for the reception or training of blind persons;
- (c) endeavour to extend the avenues of employment and training facilities (including home-training) for blind persons and report on these matters to the Secretary from time to time but not less than once in each calendar year.
- (d) make surveys of the conditions under which blind persons are housed or employed whenever requested to do so by the Secretary.”

### Comments on the Act

During the discussion of the Bill in the House of Assembly certain



members objected to the clause in the Act which made provision for Whites and Coloureds only, and that the Blacks and Asians were excluded. On this the Minister replied that he left the matter to the then Department of Native Affairs in regard to the Blacks, and the Department of the Interior in regard to the Asians. Both Departments responded to this. The Department of Native Affairs made an amount of R40 000 available for the first year in support of individual blind Blacks over 18 years of age, and the Department of the Interior R10 000 for blind Asians.<sup>39</sup>

A shortcoming in the Act is that the actual sums which are to be paid out are stipulated in the Act. It would have been more fitting to include them in the Regulations. Very soon it was obvious that the amounts were inadequate and they could only be amended through Parliament by means of an amending act. If the amounts had been stated in the Regulations the changes could have been made by proclamation. This matter was not rectified until the new Blind Persons Act (Act No. 26 of 1968) was promulgated.

Apart from these apparent deficiencies the importance of the Act must once more be stressed. If the contents of each is examined in detail, one realises with what precision and insight it had been drafted. Besides the material aid which was granted to individuals and organizations the Act also contained a rehabilitation element. Not only does it concern the distribution of financial aid but the Council and its organizations are also urged to serve the interests of the blind. Actually this is an extremely important aspect of the original Act which unfortunately was not incorporated in the new Act (Act No. 26 of 1968).

### **Amendments**

The Blind Persons Act (Act No 11 of 1936) was twice revoked and a new act passed by Parliament in its place. In 1962 the first annulment occurred and the original Act was replaced by the Blind Persons Act, 1962 (Act No. 39 of 1962). Between the first Act (1936) and the second Act (1962) three amending acts were passed, namely Act No. 25 of 1946, Act No 17 of 1951 and Act No. 46 of 1960. These amending acts were revoked later and consolidated in the new Act of 1962.

### **Act No. 39 of 1962**

Basically there is no difference between the first and the second Acts, although certain procedures to be followed concerning the granting of

pensions were more clearly stated.

An important amendment in the Act was the addition of Indians and Blacks to the list of population groups so that all four groups now participated in the privileges as prescribed in the Act.

The Act also contains a revised list of amounts which are allocated as pensions to the various population groups.

As in the former Act, clause 10 indicates the powers and duties of the Council.

The Regulations, drawn up under this Act, are hardly different from the first Act. Once more the procedures are more specifically stated.

### **Act No. 26 of 1968**

An important departure from all previous Acts and amending Acts is that in this Act there is no reference to the S.A. National Council for the Blind. Furthermore the Act is geared almost entirely to the registration of blind persons and the payment of pensions and subsidies. One misses the rehabilitation aspects and the interest in the blind individual which was a feature of the previous Acts.

Another important departure is that in this Act for the first time, the actual amounts of the pensions are omitted. They appear in the Regulations which were published under the Act. This is an improvement.

Although this Act applies to all population groups, Clause 17 makes provision for the issuing of separate Regulations for the four population groups: Coloureds, Indians, Blacks and Whites. Clause 17 (3) of the Act reads as follows:

“Different regulations may be made under sub-section (1) in respect of different areas or in respect of persons belonging to different classes or races.”

The Regulations hardly differ from those issued under Act No. 39 of 1962. The wording of the definition of blindness, however, is more explicit. It is based on the criterion which had been laid down 32 years before in the first Act (1936).

Act No. 26 of 1968 was amended by Act No. 16 of 1971. However, this amendment is only administrative in character.

<sup>1</sup> Minutes: Meeting of Executive Committee of 2 July, 1930, page 3.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of 6 March 1930 (page 44 of the Minute Book).

<sup>3</sup> Minute Book, page 72.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 December 1929 (page 29 of the Minute Book).

<sup>5</sup> Minute book, page 38.

<sup>6</sup> Minute Book, page 8.

- <sup>7</sup> Fifth Biennial Report (1937-1938) of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, page 11.
- <sup>8</sup> Minute Book, pages 41 and 42. (Meeting held on 6 March 1930).
- <sup>9</sup> First Biennial Report, 1929-30, page 11-15.
- <sup>10</sup> Minute Book, page 126 (9th meeting of the Executive Committee).
- <sup>11</sup> Minutes of meeting of Executive Committee of 17 September 1930.
- <sup>12</sup> Third Biennial Report, page 27.
- <sup>13</sup> and <sup>14</sup> Third Biennial Report, page 25.
- <sup>15</sup> Minute Book, page 44. Meeting of 6 March, 1930.
- <sup>16</sup> Third Biennial Report (1933-1934), page 38.
- <sup>17</sup> Minute Book, page 272.
- <sup>18</sup> This press cutting book has unfortunately not been preserved. It would have afforded the researcher an interesting look into the opinion of the press during the initial years of the Council.
- <sup>19</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of 4 July 1932 – Minute Book page 160
- <sup>20</sup> Minute Book, page 179. Executive Committee meeting held 14 December 1932.
- <sup>21</sup> Minute Book, page 209.
- <sup>22</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Executive of 12 April 1933, Minute Book page 216.
- <sup>23</sup> Minute Book, page 269.
- <sup>24</sup> Minutes of Executive Committee meeting held on 4 June, 1933. Minute Book, page 222.
- <sup>25</sup> Minute Book, page 130.
- <sup>26</sup> Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 13 March, 1931.
- <sup>27</sup> Minute Book, page 9.
- <sup>28</sup> Minute Book, page 84-85. Biennial Meeting of Council, held 10 March, 1931.
- <sup>29</sup> Minute Book, page 101. Meeting held 13 March, 1931.
- <sup>30</sup> Ds. P. J. Perold, representative of Die Algemene Armesorg Kommissie van die N.G. Kerk, was Deputy Chairman of the Council.
- <sup>31</sup> Minute Book, page 207. Meeting held 10-12 April, 1933.
- <sup>32</sup> Third Biennial Report (1933-1934) page 12.
- <sup>33</sup> Data obtained from the Second Biennial Report, pages 13-14.
- <sup>34</sup> This is the full title of the Bill. The short title is found in Clause 14 of the Act and is "The Blind Persons Act, 1936".
- <sup>35</sup> Quoted from the Fourth Biennial Report (page 14), since the minutes of the above-mentioned Executive Committee meeting are no longer available. The pen has pride of place in the archives of Council.
- <sup>36</sup> The Union of South Africa – name of the country from 1910 to 1961 before the Republic of South Africa came into being.
- <sup>37</sup> These are excerpts from newspaper cuttings which were collected in a book of cuttings by Mrs L. Bowen, wife of Adv. Bowen, kindly lent by Miss A. F. Gillies, niece of Mrs Bowen.
- <sup>38</sup> Chairman of Committees of the House of Assembly.
- <sup>39</sup> Fourth Biennial Report (1935-36) pages 24-25.

## CHAPTER 4

### *THE FIRST YEARS AFTER LEGISLATION 1936 to 1940*

The period which followed immediately after the passing of the Blind Persons Act brought marked changes in the various facets of services to the blind in our country. Especially societies which had workshops under their management could, as a result of substantial financial aid from the State, consolidate their activities, improve their organization and devise plans for expansion. In this way their production was raised and their turnover increased. In the reports of most of these societies mention was made of the passing of the Blind Persons Act by Parliament as "the fulfilment of a long-felt want", as the Secretary of the Cape Town Society described it in a report. This same society told in the fifth biennial report of the Council (1937-38) of considerable expansion in numbers and production, and continued: "The Society is engaged in drawing up plans which will make provision for the supplying of work to another 100 workers and for the augmentation of the kinds of work which can be done". In Council's sixth biennial report (1939-1940) a comparative table appears in which the yearly turnover of the Cape Town Society's workshop from 1929 to 1940 is given. It had risen from R3 752 to almost R10 000. This tendency was noticeable in the reports of all workshops during that period.

Other aspects of the work clearly showed the benefits derived from the passing of the Act. The Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind wrote as follows in the fourth biennial report of Council:

"The passing of the Blind Persons Act has made the prospects of our children much brighter and the old difficulty of trainees leaving the school before the completion of their prescribed course of training will probably disappear as a result of the clause in the Act by virtue of which such blind applicants forfeit their pension for a number of years."

The National Council itself grew more purposeful in its task as a



welfare organisation and a co-ordinator of services. This was chiefly due to the responsibilities and duties which were assigned to it by the Blind Persons Act. Of this there are several examples. Thus we find that in the fifth biennial report of Council reference is made on different occasions to clauses in the Act and the Regulations whereby certain commissions were to be executed by the secretariat. This especially pertained to matters such as the keeping of records concerning the registration of blind persons (in accordance with Regulation 27), yearly reports to the Department of Social Welfare with regard to the efforts of the Council to find new avenues of employment (in accordance with Regulation 24c) and the obtaining of certificates from the principals of the two schools for the blind to prove that certain applicants for pensions had indeed completed their school courses in accordance with Clause 4(i) of the Act.

It must be noted to his credit that the Organising Secretary of the Council carried out all these prescribed tasks meticulously, and even went further than the requirements of the Act. This paved the way for better and more efficient service. Through contact with the various societies for the blind he was able to exhort them to greater efforts.

The greatest direct advantage which resulted from the Act was the granting of pensions to blind persons under certain stipulated conditions. This afforded great relief to the indigent blind person who, often on account of circumstances beyond his control such as old age, unemployment, lack of training facilities, illness and other similar obstacles, could not make a decent living. The granting of pensions, although the amounts were small initially, also lifted a great burden from the shoulders of societies.

As a result of the registration of a blind person (which is a condition for the granting of a pension) and the ophthalmic examination which accompanied it, valuable statistics could be gathered concerning the eye conditions of blind persons in the country. The fact that in many cases ophthalmic surgeons could determine that blindness in certain persons might have been prevented, or that the sight of others could be improved even at a late stage, urged Council to take more positive steps with regard to the prevention of blindness.

After it had become known that the Blind Persons Act had been promulgated, the registration of blind persons began. At first the offices of the Council in Pretoria and Cape Town were inundated with medical data about blindness and partial sight among Whites and Coloureds,

the two population groups for whom provision had initially been made by the Act. Later when the Blacks and Indians were also included, the flow was still greater. But even before the Blacks were included, surveys of Black blind persons were made in certain areas and this resulted in still greater stress being placed on the necessity for prevention services.

The Organising Secretary of the Council tabulated all the data which appeared in the application forms, and built up valuable statistics. These schedules were published in full in the fourth and fifth biennial report of the Council:<sup>1</sup>

The fourth biennial report supplies data concerning the geographical distribution of registered blind persons (at first only Whites and Coloureds) classified according to provinces, ages at which blindness had set in, causes of blindness and the spreading of two diseases, namely retinitis pigmentosa and trachoma.

The fifth biennial report also supplies statistical data about registered Black blind persons. It states the figures as at 31 December, 1938. The sample of Black blind persons was 8 379 which was approximately an estimated third of the total Black blind population at that time. An unsatisfactory aspect of the statistics was the fact that in the schedule which stated the causes of blindness among Blacks, 4 272 were classified as "unknown". This represented 51% of the total. Here it must be mentioned that these eye examinations were not performed by ophthalmic surgeons. It can be stated, however, that the findings of the ophthalmologists regarding the eye conditions amongst all population groups acted as an incentive for the country-wide campaign for the prevention of blindness and the eventual establishment of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness which will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

### **Compulsory Education**

Apart from the marked progress which had been made in the field of services to the blind as a result of the passing of the Act, there were a few other important events which had occurred from 1936 to 1940, which are worthy of attention.

In the first instance, Act No. 43 of 1937, which makes provision for the compulsory education of White blind children was passed by Parliament. It compels parents or guardians of children of school-going age "who, owing to physical, mental or behaviour disabilities, are un-

able to benefit sufficiently from instruction and training given in ordinary schools, or whose attendance at such schools may prove harmful to themselves or to others, to send such children to a special school".<sup>2</sup>

Seeing that the Act was applicable to White children only, the question of compulsory education for children of other population groups was discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee and it was resolved to bring the matter to the attention of the Council. At the fourth biennial meeting of Council held in Port Elizabeth in November 1937 Mr Biesenbach, Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind, submitted the following proposal:

- "(a) That this meeting of the National Council for the Blind records its gratification at the passing of the Special Schools Act, No. 43 of 1937, but regrets that the compulsory provisions do not include, at least, non-European children attending Union State or State-aided special schools;
- (b) That this meeting of Council urges the Government to extend the period of compulsory education, so as to include the full vocational courses at the schools for the blind."

Initially the school-leaving age was 16. It was felt that it should be higher in view of the fact that by that age no pupil would be able to complete his schooling as well as his vocational training. The Special Education Act, 1948 (No. 9 of 1948), finally solved the problem. It stipulated that, compulsory education would be until 19 years. The Secretary for Education could, however, direct that this be extended to 21 years and even up to 24 years on certification that such an arrangement was in the interest of the child.

## Home Teaching

The first society to introduce home teaching as part of its social services was the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society. It was in 1939 that Miss Agnes Brown (later Mrs G. Schermbrucker) was appointed in this capacity. This was after her return from England where she had successfully completed the appropriate course in home teaching. After this only three more persons qualified in home teaching, and today this system has fallen completely into disuse. Home teachers have been replaced by social workers.

Home teaching, which had its origin in England, where home teachers are still being trained, has an interesting history. A society called the Indigent Blind Visiting Society had been established in the thirties



of the previous century. Its aims were chiefly to supply aid, financial and otherwise, to indigent, lonely and old people. When the sight of Thomas Rhodes Armitage became so impaired that he had to give up his profession as a medical doctor, he joined the above society and personally took part in visiting the blind. To his deep concern he discovered that not only were the poor and the aged in need of care, but also many other blind people, even young people — men and women — who were unemployed and had no place to live. Armitage, a man with both insight and drive, reorganized the society completely and appointed blind persons who had to visit and assist other blind people. His new approach immediately showed results.

This aid to the blind, which in time took on different forms and became more extensive, later took on such great proportions that Dr Armitage decided to establish an organisation with a view to co-ordinating all services to the blind. It was known as the British and Foreign Blind Association. Established in 1868, it was the forerunner of the present well known Royal National Institute for the Blind. A part of the activities of the association was the training of home teachers and the establishment of home teaching services.

Apart from the Cape Town Society there were, according to the records at our disposal, only two other societies who had qualified home teachers in their employ, namely those of Johannesburg and Pretoria.

As regards the interest shown in home teaching by the National Council, we find that the matter had already been discussed at its inauguration at Cape Town in March 1929. The following resolution was then passed:

“This Conference is impressed by the necessity for the appointment of a bilingual home teacher or teachers and requests the Government to appoint itinerant home teachers or subsidize the appointment of such teachers.”<sup>3</sup>

During the ten years after this resolution had been adopted no reference was made to home teaching. A short announcement merely appeared in the sixth biennial report of the Council (1939-40) to the effect that the home teacher of the Cape Town Society had completed the course with outstanding success, and had returned to South Africa.<sup>4</sup> This was the previously mentioned Miss Brown.

It was only in September 1952 at its eleventh biennial meeting at Grahamstown that the matter was again brought to the notice of the Council. Mr C. B. Anderson of the Johannesburg Society introduced a



motion in which he expressed regret that so little attention had been paid so far to home teaching and requested Council to appoint a committee with a view to studying the implications of such a system in the light of the great value it could be to the blind. A committee for home teaching was appointed with Miss May Rogers as Chairman. It was left to the Executive Committee to draft its terms of reference. Miss Rogers, Secretary of the Johannesburg Society, was an enthusiastic supporter of home teaching because she believed that services rendered to the blind should bear the stamp of professionalism.

According to the first report of the Committee, which was laid before the Executive Committee at its meeting of 25 March, 1953, it appears that the Committee concerned itself mainly with a *modus operandi* for the training of home teachers in South Africa. The following should receive attention:

The nature of the instruction (with syllabus).

The centres where provision should be made for instruction.

The examination of candidates.

The conditions of service from home teachers.

The procuring of subsidy for their salaries.

The functions and duties of home teachers.

The Executive Committee resolved to approach the Union Education Department with the request to draw up the syllabus, conduct the examinations and issue the certificates.

The following report of the committee for home teaching was handed in on the occasion of the 12th biennial meeting of the National Council, held at Durban on 28-30 September, 1954. It was drawn up by the Organising Secretary, as Miss Rogers, the Chairman, had died in the meantime. Tribute was paid to Miss Rogers in the introduction as follows:

"It is with a sense of profound sorrow that this Committee records the passing away on 15 June 1954 of its Chairman, the late Miss A. M. Rogers, who took such a keen interest in a home teaching service for the blind in South Africa."

In the report most aspects of the system of home teaching were dealt with and all the recommendations were approved by Council. A summary is given below:

- (i) The duration of the training will be one year, which will include practical field work under suitable supervision.
- (ii) The centre where training will take place be an accredited

society for the blind, initially the Society for Civilian Blind, Johannesburg.

- (iii) The provisions for admission include a degree or diploma in social work. Matriculants will also be allowed to follow the course, but will not be eligible to receive a complete certificate. Such a person will be considered to be an auxiliary who will not be able to serve as an independent home teacher.
- (iv) All population groups will be allowed to follow the course.
- (v) The Department of Education, Arts and Science will be requested to draw up the syllabus and to conduct the examinations.
- (vi) The salary scales which were recommended for subsidising by the Department of Social Welfare must be drawn up.

Later Council was notified that the Department of Social Welfare would indeed subsidise the salaries with 50 per cent as recommended. Council was also advised by the Department of Education, Arts and Science that Mr P. E. Biesenbach, Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind, had been requested to draw up a draft syllabus for the course.

The matter had now already dragged on until 1955. At a meeting of the Executive held on 2 March, 1955, the Organising Secretary reported that two posts for home teachers had been approved for subsidy purposes namely those of Miss E. Geyer of Pretoria and Miss Valentine of Johannesburg. There was also a third qualified home teacher back in South Africa, namely Miss C. C. du Toit. According to the report of the committee for home teaching she was appointed by the Cape Town Society (probably in the place of Miss Brown who had then already resigned), but she preferred to accept a post in the Department of Social Welfare. In point of fact there were thus only two home teachers in the service of affiliated societies in 1955, after the first one had been appointed in 1939.

The Committee for Home Teaching also indicated in its report that the Johannesburg Society did not see its way clear to undertake the training of home teachers. It was therefore decided to request the Department of Education, Arts and Science to conduct the course.

This request was forwarded to the Department and at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26 March, 1957, it was reported that a letter had been received from the Department of Union Education in

which it was announced that a course for the training of home teachers would begin early in 1958 at the Worcester School for the Blind.

As regards the Worcester project unexpected problems were experienced from the outset. These concerned matters such as fees for the course and for boarding which would be charged by the school. The National Council decided to ask the Worcester School to offer the course free of charge, while Council itself would make a grant of £288 (R576) available to every candidate for boarding. A further problem developed in connection with the qualifications required for admission. Should the course be a post-graduate one for those with a degree in social work or should matriculated persons be allowed to follow a one-year course? The matter was then referred to a sub-committee for investigation.

Apparently nothing came of this investigation, for at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 20-22 October, 1959, the Chairman of the Council (Dr L. van Schalkwijk) reported that the introduction of such a course at a university would be impossible. Following on this the Principal of the Worcester School again offered to introduce the course at the school, but it was only in 1961 that a start could be made. Obviously the Executive Committee accepted this but no records could be found to prove that the matter was pursued further.

The real reason why the training of home teachers never became a reality must be sought in the appointment of more and more social workers by societies for the blind. The latter was of course a step forward in the wide scope of services to the blind, but even today there are those who are in favour of a system of home teaching coupled to that of social work. They contend that the home teacher by reason of her specialised training is able to build up a more intimate relationship with her clients.

Today the general view is that the social worker with the required qualifications can orientate herself sufficiently by experience and private study to discharge her duties effectively as a professional officer of an organization for the blind.

The approved syllabus of the proposed course for home teaching which never became a reality gives a very clear indication of what is expected of a home teacher and can certainly be used even today with a view to self-study and possible refresher courses for social workers who are attached to organizations for the blind.<sup>5</sup> It includes inter alia the following: Knowledge of braille and moon and the method of in-



struction of braille to adults; knowledge of amenities, concessions and privileges for the blind such as pensions, library services, apparatus, transcription services, certain provisions of law, holiday resorts, old age homes etc.; knowledge of the problems of the pre-school child and parent relationships; psychological aspects of blindness; adjustment and readjustment; techniques in connection with case studies; interviews; eye conditions; medical services; problems in connection with employment; knowledge of and instruction in recreation and problems connected therewith; mobility; etc.

Much space has been devoted to home teaching. By this we wished to demonstrate that the necessity for establishing professional services of a particular nature for the blind had indeed been realised in former years.

### **Finances**

It has already been mentioned that the main source of income for the Council was the street collections which were held throughout the country, on or around the first Saturday in May of each year. Through the zeal of the secretariat these efforts were crowned with success year after year. The Organising Secretary personally concerned himself with the matter and the correspondence of those times indicated that he continually followed up the work.

It was, however, felt that other sources of revenue should be explored and the Organising Secretary decided to focus attention on the possibility of bequests.

Firstly he included a form of bequest in the third biennial report of the Council (1933-1934). In September 1934 he circularised all Trust Companies and approximately four hundred attorneys "expressing the hope that should they have the opportunity of advising testators on bequests of a charitable nature, or executors on the allocation of funds at their disposal, they would bear the National Council in mind and favourably bring it to the notice of the persons concerned."<sup>6</sup>

This action of the Organising Secretary seemed to have had the desired effect judging firstly from the large number of replies received, which in the case of a few even held out the prospect that legacies would probably be forthcoming. Secondly, it was reported that two legacies had reached head office soon after. The first came from the estate of the late E. W. Howard, former town clerk of Krugersdorp, for the sum of £200 (R400) and the second from the estate of the late H. A.



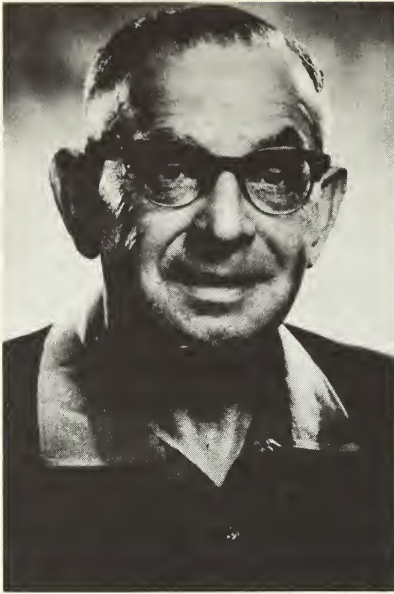
Oliver, former Mayor of Kimberley, for the sum of £500 (R1 000). These were received during 1935. Also at that time a sum of £15 000 (R30 000) was left to the Council from the estate of Johanna Aletta Stahl, wife of the former Mayor of Middelburg, Cape. The will stipulated that the interest on the money should be used on behalf of blind persons resident in the Cape Province only. Although the bequest did not benefit the Council directly, it could nevertheless, on account of its having been assigned the duty of distributing the money, comply with one of its important objectives, namely to bring alleviation to needy blind persons, as well as aid to persons who could benefit by it in their daily tasks. Students, here and abroad, were also classified amongst the latter. That was the time when bursaries were as yet unavailable for further study.

The fourth biennial report (1935-1936) states that the money from the Stahl Bequest came at a time when there was a long delay with the first payment of pensions to blind persons. This was as a result of the numerous applications which had streamed in directly after the promulgation of the Blind Persons Act in 1936. These persons, all in need of relief, could for the time being be helped through the Stahl Bequest. It would appear that initially the individual applications had been sent directly to the office of Council. Later it was decided that they should be channelled through recognised organizations. These organizations were not only affiliated societies but also national bodies, for example the various women's associations. Later on the names of these external associations disappeared from the statement of payments and only the names of affiliated societies were listed.

Legacies played an increasingly important role throughout the years in the procurement of funds for the Council. In some cases the legacy consisted of an outright general donation, in others it was earmarked for a certain purpose and often contained a condition that only the interest could be used. Although legacies are a very unpredictable form of income, some sort of pattern developed over the years so that it became possible for the treasurer to include such an item in the annual budget. It has occasionally happened that an unexpected bequest has saved the Council from dire financial straits.

### **"Trophy of Light"**

A meaningful source of income for the Council for many years has been the "Trophy of Light" golf tournaments. The first tournament



Mr Hymy Matthews, Vice-President of the S.A.  
National Council for the Blind.



Miss M. T. Watson, one of the first two Vice-  
Presidents of the S.A. National Council for the  
Blind.

was held in May 1937 at the Clovelly Golf Club, near Cape Town. As time went on it spread to other parts of the country and sometimes also involved bowls clubs. As regards the first tournament, we quote the following from the fourth biennial report (1935-1936):

“Mr Hyman Matthews conceived the idea and presented the Trophy, actually as a result of the appeal issued by Advocate Bowen on behalf of the Athlone School Building Fund, who generously suggested that as the Competition was to be an annual one, the proceeds be given to the Council. The first competition was well-supported and proved a great success. A sum totalling £108-7-3 was raised. The Executive Committee of Council, taking into consideration the origin of Mr Matthews’ generous offer, donated the entire proceeds of the first competition to the Athlone School Building Fund.”

After this the proceeds generally went to the Council excepting when Mr Matthews made a request that certain contributions should be made to other specified projects. This was always granted. In the ninth biennial report a summary is given of the funds which had been collected during the first period of 10 years (1937-1947). The amount totalled R5 052. Following this it appears that the proceeds increased rapidly. In 1950 the amount was R1 520, in 1952 it was R1 840. In 1954 four more golf clubs had already joined and the sum totalled R3 929 in that year. The Garrison Club of Pretoria had alone contributed R2 540 of this money.<sup>7</sup>

The National Council is deeply grateful towards Mr Matthews for this exceptional method of fund raising which he started more than 40 years ago, and with which he is still occupied. Not only did he aid the Council financially but by reason of his contact with various sporting bodies he was able to convey the image and work of the National Council further afield to wider and more important circles of the community.

Mr Matthews served the cause of the blind in various other fields and at present is the Vice-President of the National Council. Later on attention will be given in an appropriate manner to his other important services in the interests of the blind.

### **The Silver Jubilee Cup**

To commemorate the silver jubilee of the Coronation of the King (George V), the Governor-General, the Earl of Clarendon, presented a



floating trophy to the National Council in 1935, for which the workshops and schools would compete yearly. The items for the competition represented different trades for both men and women, as well as typing and the writing of braille.

The first competition was held that same year (1935). Three societies and two schools competed. The winner was the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society who gained an average of 95,5 per cent for the ten items they had entered. The second place was won by the Worcester School for the Blind and the third by the Port Elizabeth Society. The other competitors were the Athlone School for the Blind and the Pretoria Society. As regards the latter, the following quotation from the report<sup>8</sup> is quite noteworthy: "It is interesting to note that the Pretoria Society for the Blind submitted only three instead of ten items for the competition securing 100 per cent each for two and 95 per cent for the other."

The second competition was held in 1937 at the time of the fourth biennial meeting of the Council at Port Elizabeth, when four workshops and two schools competed.

The cup was won by the Worcester School for the Blind, with the Cape Town Society in second place.<sup>9</sup>

The third competition, which was held in June 1939 at Durban, was again won by the Worcester School for the Blind, with the Cape Town Society second.<sup>10</sup>

After this no further records of any other competitions could be found. It is likely that they may have been discontinued as a result of the outbreak of war (September 1939). Serious problems arose at that time with regard to the importation of cane, especially when the war spread to the East.

### "Sight saving" Classes

Chiefly as a result of the concern and active involvement of Dr Louis van Schalkwijk who was inspector of special schools at the time, the case of the partially sighted child was continually kept in the foreground. The matter was raised at practically every meeting of the Executive Committee and of the full Council. Regrettably little progress was made, chiefly as a result of the fact that agreement could not be reached amongst the education authorities as to who should accept responsibility for this type of education. Actually it belonged under special education, which was administrated by the central government, but partial sight did not appear on the list of disabilities for which pro-



vision had been made in the Special Schools Act (1928). Thus the education of partially sighted children was still the responsibility of the provincial education departments. It appeared however that they were hesitant to venture into this type of education. On the insistence of the National Council they did indeed make efforts to test the eyesight of suspect cases, but there was no question of an organised educational programme for these children. It may be mentioned here that the partially sighted children were not left in the lurch, but were admitted to schools for the blind (both at Athlone and at Worcester). Here they followed an adapted programme and their achievements were generally very satisfactory. (In 1934 the Athlone School for the Blind introduced a class for partially sighted children, the first in the country). As far back as 1929, at the Conference when Council was founded, Dr Van Schalkwijk had already broached the subject of tests for children with defective sight in the form of a resolution.<sup>11</sup>

It is possible that the Organising Secretary had been in contact with the Department of Union Education concerning the matter for Dr Van Schalkwijk made an announcement in connection with the matter at a meeting of the Executive Committee which took place on 17 September 1930. The entry in the minutes reads as follows:

“Dr Van Schalkwijk said as a result of the activities of the National Council the Union Education Department had convened a conference of Medical Inspectors of Schools and, whereas school children’s eyesight and hearing were formerly tested only if special attention was drawn to them by the teachers or principals, a scheme has now been drawn up whereby the various Education Departments arranged for the systematic routine examination of the eyesight of all school children. Since there was no compulsory education for Coloured children, only those actually in the schools under the Departments could be medically inspected.”

The outcome of the above conference of medical inspectors is not known, nor the procedure which was to be followed to test the children. It is indeed doubtful whether it was possible to undertake a task of such proportions in our country at that time. The National Council, and especially Dr Van Schalkwijk, must be commended, however, for the efforts to take such positive action on behalf of the partially sighted child and his education in 1930, only a year after the foundation of the Council.

The seriousness with which the Council treated the matter is indicated by the fact that 'Dr Van Schalkwijk was requested to deliver a paper at the Council's first biennial meeting (11 March 1931) on:

"Instruction and education of partially sighted children."

This address was printed in 1932 and distributed free through the office of the National Council. At least one copy is still available. It affords a clear outline of the educational views of 45 years ago which as a whole do not differ much from those of today. Dr Van Schalkwijk had *inter alia* advocated the necessity of introducing special classes in ordinary schools but rightly pointed out that the identification of such children in order to qualify would not be an easy task. For this examinations by medical specialists would be necessary, as well as a fixed criterion for admission.

After the paper had been read a discussion followed, and the meeting adopted a historic resolution in which the authorities were urgently requested to give the matter their serious attention. In the wording of the resolution a directive was given concerning the form of instruction which should be given to such children, as well as statistical data. It is also noteworthy that the request was made to the education authorities in general, considering that doubt still existed as to which education authority (provincial or central) should be responsible for the education of the partially sighted. The resolution reads as follows:

"The S.A. National Council for the Blind wishes to urge on the education authorities concerned, the health and educational needs of partially sighted children, that is, children who owing to eye or vision defects, cannot and should not attend ordinary classroom teaching, and for whom braille as a medium of instruction is neither desirable nor necessary. Reliable statistics obtained in other countries show that at least one child out of every 500 of the school population requires special instruction in what are known as sight conservation classes."

Perhaps a few words concerning the term "sight conservation" are necessary here, considering that it is not used any more today. In the early days the education programme was drawn up with the purpose of "saving" the child's sight in order to keep it from deteriorating. It was believed that if the child used his eyes too much it would weaken his sight. Today ophthalmic surgeons are convinced that this is not the case. In fact it is beneficial to use the eyes for reading and other visual

activities, provided the conditions are favourable. When the first school was established in London in 1908 the principal was so concerned about the eyes of his pupils that he initially prohibited reading and writing. In connection with this Hathaway <sup>12</sup> writes: "At first in the Myope School<sup>13</sup> reading and writing were prohibited, as proclaimed by the legend over the door — 'Reading and Writing Shall Not Enter Here'." The change in viewpoint concerning the education of the partially sighted child, which is based on research with regard to the use of the eyes, resulted in his education being brought much nearer to that of the normal child. At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 2 December 1931, the whole question of eye tests for school children was discussed once more. The Organising Secretary submitted the reports of the medical inspectors of three provincial education departments (Cape, O.F.S. and Natal) in which data of the eye tests on children appeared. The information was illuminating, but the problem was that no organization existed to treat the eye defects. It also happened that only those children were tested who had been specially referred to doctors, and that no routine examinations of all children had been carried out. As a result of this the following resolution was adopted by the Executive:

"This Executive hopes that the Provincial Education Authorities will make provision for the inclusion of sight and vision tests as part of the routine inspection of school children."<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore it was resolved that the various departments of education be requested to send their reports on the eye conditions of children regularly to the office of the National Council. Although little was achieved in connection with this it proved that the National Council was sensitive towards this problem. That Dr Van Schalkwijk was determined to carry through the cause of the partially sighted is indicated by the fact that he later proposed that a sub-committee be appointed to request an interview with the Superintendent-General of Education of the Cape Province with the intention of discussing the establishment of at least one class for partially sighted children in the Cape Province. This proposal was approved at the same meeting of the Executive Committee, namely on 2 December 1931. Dr Van Schalkwijk declared that he was willing to draw up a scheme for such a class to be submitted to the Superintendent-General of Education. That a great deal of doubt still existed as to who should bear the responsibility is shown by the following remark in the minutes:



"If the scheme were successful, it might confidently be hoped that the class would be taken over by the Union Education Department. Another class might be started in Johannesburg at the same time."

In the meantime a year had passed and at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 14 December 1932, correspondence was read which had taken place between the Council and the Cape Department of Education. In this the Department agreed that such a class be established in the Peninsula. The correspondence also indicated:

"That by reason of the time necessary for all preliminary investigations the Department was very doubtful whether the scheme for special classes for hard-of-hearing and partially sighted pupils could materialise before 1934."<sup>15</sup>

Dr Van Schalkwijk reported on what was being done in the north in connection with this matter. An interview had taken place with the Director of Education of the Transvaal, and a memorandum was sent to the Department. Dr Van Schalkwijk concluded his report on a very optimistic note:

"Such a class would probably be established either in Johannesburg or in Pretoria in 1933 or perhaps in both if numbers justified such a step."<sup>16</sup>

After this we find that the matter was discussed at almost every meeting of the Executive Committee during the following years. But in spite of numerous resolutions which were taken, correspondence which was conducted with the education authorities and deputations to the heads of education departments, concrete results did not materialise. It appeared that willingness to get the classes established did exist in certain departments of education, but the administrative problems were apparently insurmountable.

In the sixth biennial report of the Council (1939-1940) the Chairman summarised the situation as follows:

"It is with extreme regret that I have to report, after ten years of strenuous and persistent efforts by your Executive Committee and the Secretariat of Council, the complete failure of Provincial Education Departments to establish a single class to provide special means of education for partially sighted children in South Africa."

This then was the situation after a decade of negotiations with the educational authorities in connection with the establishment of an



educational system for partially sighted children in our country. Apart from a class for a few partially sighted children which was established at the Athlone School for the Blind in 1934, no real progress on a national basis could be reported. When in a later chapter the course of events after 1940 is dealt with, it will be reported that two more decades would elapse before the education of the partially sighted would become an accomplished fact.

### **Resignation of the Organising Secretary**

An important event which took place during this period was the resignation of the Organising Secretary of the Council, Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith, at the end of 1940. He had served the Council in this capacity since its inception in 1929.

On the occasion of his departure the Executive Committee at its meeting of 10 December, 1940, expressed genuine appreciation for his loyal service to the Council and his untiring efforts on behalf of the blind. Mention was also made of the conscientious manner in which he performed his administrative duties, especially with regard to keeping the records and statistics according to a system designed by himself.

Adv. R. W. Bowen, the Chairman, also paid tribute to him in the sixth biennial report of the Council as follows:

“The presentation of this, my sixth biennial report of the activities of the Council, would be incomplete if I failed to pay a richly-deserved tribute to the Organising Secretary of the Council who, throughout its lifetime of twelve years, has guided its activities and been responsible for the translation into practical effort of the policy and decisions of the Council and of its Executive Committee. . . . His keen interest in all aspects of blind welfare, his energy, attention to detail and skilful handling of administrative and other problems, have combined, with his tact and patience and his facility in the two official languages of the Union, to place the Council and those for whose welfare it exists under a lasting debt of gratitude to him.”

In the same report the Chairman also referred to a letter of appreciation which he had received from Mr P. E. Biesenbach, Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind at that time, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Council. The following extract from the letter by Mr Biesenbach which referred to Mr Prescott-Smith, was quoted:

"I cannot even attempt to summarise all he has done for blind welfare work in South Africa. That would mean a summary of all the biennial reports hitherto issued by the Council. The achievements of the last twelve years in the field of blind welfare work in this country must to a great extent be put down to the credit of the Organising Secretary of the National Council during that period. It would be a travesty of history to deny this."

Dr Van Schalkwijk too had high esteem for the services which Mr Prescott-Smith had rendered. In a letter to the Chairman toward the end of 1936 Dr Van Schalkwijk made the following comments, not only on the work of the Organising Secretary but also on the achievements of the Council itself:

"Although it has been in existence for only eight years the National Council for the Blind has made exceptional progress, and I count it amongst the most active and progressive social welfare agencies in the Union. Its achievement culminated in the passage through Parliament this year, seven years and seven days after the establishment of the National Council, of the Blind Persons Act which is considered one of the most progressive and enlightened forms of blind legislation in the world. Mr Prescott-Smith's participation in this work can be best described by saying that the South African National Council for the Blind, in its present stage of development, is largely his creation. . . . I serve (if may be permitted to say so) on the Executive Committees of six national organisations connected with social welfare, and in none of those agencies is the Secretariat more efficiently conducted than in the National Council for the Blind. Should Mr Prescott-Smith at any time relinquish his post as Organising Secretary of the National Council for the Blind he will leave behind him a standard of proficiency in his work which his successor or successors may well find it difficult to emulate."

In the last part of his report Adv. Bowen wrote:

"His departure at this stage from the position he has filled with such distinction will be a great loss to the effectiveness of our national organisation, but his methodical accuracy in the arrangement of his records will make it possible for any successor to derive much assistance and information from the research undertaken by him during the twelve years of service."

He served on various government committees, and represented the

Council on several bodies. One of the most important committees on which he served was the *Committee of Enquiry into Sheltered Employment* which was appointed in 1948 by Dr A. J. Stals, who was Minister of Social Welfare at that time.

The Committee's report (also known as the Williamson report, after the Chairman, Brigadier Edwin Williamson, C.B.E.), today has historical value only, seeing that the recommendations and resolutions which resulted from it are not applicable to circumstances at the present time. What is relevant, however, for our purpose is Mr Prescott-Smith's involvement in the drafting of the report as well as his outspoken opposition to some of the committee's recommendations, which he set forth in a memorandum which was included in the report as an addendum. This not only demonstrates the determination with which he acted on behalf of the cause in general, but also his interest in the welfare of each individual blind person with whom he was involved.

The S.A. National Council for the Blind was his pride. This is well illustrated in his correspondence, especially with outside bodies and persons. Thus, for example, he wrote the following to the Department of Social Welfare in a letter dated 9 January, 1940:

"The Council's annual financial statement is probably one of the most comprehensive statements of its kind issued in South Africa. . . . Three thousand copies of its biennial report for 1937-38 in both English and Afrikaans have been printed. The report contains facts and figures such as no similiar organisation in the world is in a position to publish."<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps he had the right to make such claims in regard to the Council's activities and reports, for in the same letter he quotes from correspondence which he had received from the President of the International Association for the Prevention of Blindness in Paris, France, in which comment was made on the content of the fifth biennial report of Council. The quotation is as follows:

"The constructive action of the Council in regard to preventive measures is an object of deep satisfaction to the members of this Association. We intend to publish a substantial extract from your Council's 5th Biennial Report in the next number of the *Journal of Social Ophthalmology* in the hope of inducing other national organisations to follow the lead given by your Council."

In February 1941 he was appointed General Manager of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society. In this capacity he displayed the same

administrative qualities as were evident in his previous position. He expanded the workshop and placed it on a firm foundation. He also devoted much time and energy to social work on behalf of those blind people who were not employed in the workshop. He held the post for approximately 10 years until 1951 when he retired. His health had already caused concern and he returned to his birthplace, Warrenton, to live with relatives, where he finally passed away.

<sup>1</sup> Fourth biennial report, pages 50-62.

Fifth biennial report, pages 35-67.

<sup>2</sup> Fourth biennial report, page 30.

<sup>3</sup> First minute book, page 11.

<sup>4</sup> Sixth biennial report, page 34.

<sup>5</sup> The syllabus forms part of the report of the Committee for Home Teaching: Minutes of the Executive Committee, 2 November 1955.

<sup>6</sup> Third biennial report, page 7.

<sup>7</sup> Balance sheet for year ending 31 December, 1954.

<sup>8</sup> Fourth biennial report, pages, 42-43.

<sup>9</sup> Fifth biennial report, page 20.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Biennial Meeting, 22 June, 1939, page 9.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes of conference held in Cape Town on 20 March, 1929. Minute Book, page 8.

<sup>12</sup> Hathaway, W.: Education and Health of the Partially Seeing Child, page 4.

<sup>13</sup> The school was called a myope school because most of the pupils were myopic (i.e. short sighted). The circumstances and therefore the name, were changed later.

<sup>14</sup> Minute Book, page 128 (meeting of 2 December, 1931).

<sup>15</sup> Minute Book, page 173.

<sup>16</sup> Minute Book, page 174.

<sup>17</sup> From the Archives of the Worcester School for the Blind. A copy of the letter had been sent to the Principal of the school by the organising secretary.



## CHAPTER 5

### *LAST YEARS OF THE BOWEN ERA 1941 to 1948*

We now enter a special phase in the history of the South African National Council for the Blind, namely the period which ended with the unexpected and untimely death of Adv. Bowen in the year 1948. This period covers a large part of the Second World War which ended in 1945. It was a time when great sacrifices had to be made, mainly on account of the shortage of imported goods, on which South Africa was much more dependent in those days than today. Amongst these was cane, which was needed by the workshops and which was imported from the East, whither the war had spread in 1942. A substitute material to take the place of cane was urgently needed. The schools also had problems in obtaining apparatus and materials from abroad. In connection with this the Chairman of the Council reports in the seventh biennial report (1941-1943) as follows:

“During the past three years, owing to prevailing conditions, the work of the National Council and its affiliated societies has been carried on under increased difficulties, the main difficulty being the restricted transport and travelling facilities in general, and that of obtaining suitable and sufficient materials and machinery in connection with the Schools and Workshops for the blind.”

When the supply of cane from the East came to a complete standstill, substitute materials, chiefly for basket making, had to be found. One of these was a kind of cane called “codi” which was imported from Zaire, then known as the Belgian Congo. Although a passable basket could be made of codi, the quality of the cane was poor. One workshop manager stated that after the consignment had been sorted, approximately twenty five per cent of the contents had been found to be useless. There had in fact been no sorting of sizes and quality at the point of dispatch. The result was that the quality in a consignment as well as the thickness of the individual pieces varied considerably. It had a very dark, almost black colour which compared very unfavourably

with the rich golden colour of Eastern cane. Consequently the production of all fine cane work and the caning of chairs had to be discontinued. This state of affairs continued for a long period after the end of the war because it took a considerable time before communication between the East and South Africa was normal again.

In spite of the fact that trade with the East was resumed shortly after the cessation of hostilities, many of the workshops were obliged to continue with the codi cane on account of the fact that Eastern cane had suddenly become exceedingly expensive. Circumstances abroad improved later to such an extent that they could revert to Eastern cane.

The second substitute for cane during the war years, and even after that, was willow.<sup>1</sup> In view of the fact that this particular type of raw material for the making of baskets is again being considered today, the following communication from the ninth biennial report (1946-1947) is not only interesting but also informative, especially in connection with what has been done in regard to the cultivation of this shrub:

“For the production of certain types of articles osiers (willow) are also used extensively by Societies for the Blind in the Union, and since the scarcity of cane the demand for osiers has increased during the past few years. There has been an increase in the growing of willows in the Union, and arising from representations made by our Secretariat to the Union Government, and the keen interest taken in the affairs of Council and its affiliated societies by the Secretary for Social Welfare, the Department of Social Welfare has embarked on a willow planting scheme in 1947 at its Ganspan Settlement near Warrenton, and have planted 4 000 willows, namely 2 000 *purpurea* and 2 000 *amagocilena*, which were ready for the first cutting during the 1948 cutting season. This crop has been taken over by some of our affiliated societies at the very reasonable price at which the Department is prepared to supply these osiers to Blind Welfare Societies.

The Department has planted more willows this year (1948) and subject to the findings of the societies as to the suitability of this product for their purpose, the Department of Social Welfare is anxious to go in more extensively for the growing of osiers of the various species, so as to be able to meet the demands of all welfare organisations in the Union at a low price.”

It should also be recorded that the war conditions caused the National Council to postpone the holding of its usual biennial meeting

in 1943 until the following year in 1944. Financial considerations were chiefly responsible for this. After the end of the war there was a period when readjustments had to be made for the country to return to normal. Important in this regard was the returned soldier who had to find his place in the community again. Certain social problems had to receive urgent attention, even by means of legislation. This induced the Chairman of the Council to write the following in his seventh biennial report:

“Now that movements are on foot, and legislation is being framed to deal with social problems after the war, this influence must be used to ensure that whatever schemes come into effect, the blind will not be left out.”

Notwithstanding the problems which the war and post-war conditions had caused, a great deal of progress regarding the work of the Council could be reported. Outstanding in this connection were the activities which took place in the field of the prevention of blindness. It was indeed during this period that the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness was established and has since proved the right of its existence. This will be dealt with later.

At the sixth biennial meeting of Council which took place in June 1941 at Bloemfontein Adv. Bowen was re-elected to the chair for the seventh time. This must be considered remarkable, especially in view of the fact that when the Council was founded he had refused to accept the Chairmanship and only agreed to do so after much persuasion.

The Executive Committee of the Council for the period 1941-1944 was constituted as follows:

Chairman: Adv. R. W. Bowen

Vice-Chairman: Rev. (later Dr) A. W. Blaxall

Honorary Treasurer: Mr H. A. Tothill

Members:

Elected by the Council:

Mr (later Dr) P. E. Biesenbach

Mrs C. Cawston

Mrs G. K. Nowlan

Miss J. E. Wood

Co-opted by the Executive Committee:

Mr A. D. Kirstein

Elected to represent the provinces:

Cape Province (Western): Mrs. L. C. Butler-Smith

Cape Province (Eastern): Mrs. S. H. Marks  
Natal: Mr W. H. Green  
Orange Free State: Mr C. E. Kidger  
Transvaal: Mrs. T. Moore  
Elected to represent Government Departments:  
Maj. F. Rodseth, Department of Native Affairs  
Mr P. J. Theron, Department of Union Education.

With regard to the composition of the Executive Committee it should be noted that according to the constitution a blind person had to be co-opted. In this instance he was Mr A. D. Kirstein. He was regarded as the representative of the blind, considering that, besides the Chairman, there was no other blind person elected to the Executive Committee. This continued until the tenth meeting of Council held in October 1950, when Dr W. Cohen, a blind man, was elected to the Executive Committee.

Among the names listed above, one finds that five had already served on the Executive Committee since its foundation, namely Adv. R. W. Bowen, Rev. A. W. Blaxall, Mr P. E. Biesenbach, Mrs G. K. Nowlan, and Miss J. E. Wood. There was thus a large measure of continuity which undoubtedly contributed to the success of the Council in the first decade of its existence.

A name which does not appear in the list is that of Dr Louis van Schalkwijk. At that time he was occupied with the important task of demobilisation, especially with regard to the rehabilitation of the returned soldiers. His military rank was that of major and on account of his duties in this sphere it was impossible for him to serve on the National Council at that time. However, he again took an active part in the activities of the Council later, when he was elected to the Chair in 1952, after his retirement as full-time representative of the Union of South Africa on the Council for Social Welfare of the United Nations in New York. Some of the other persons who had been elected as members of the Executive are also worth mentioning.

Mr H. A. Tothill, Honorary Treasurer and a member of the Management Board of the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind, was a businessman and a Member of Parliament for one of the Witwatersrand constituencies. He was intensely concerned about the finances of the Council, as would be expected of a treasurer, and was meticulous about the expenditure of the Council's funds.

Mrs Cawston played a leading role in the various activities of the



Council after her organization "Our Own Blind Fund Association" had been affiliated to the Council. She was a pillar of strength in welfare work for the blind of all population groups in Natal for a long period of time. Mrs Butler-Smith was the Secretary of the Cape Town Society for Civilian Blind for many years. Mrs Marks was the prime mover in welfare work for the blind of all population groups in Port Elizabeth. She was a silent worker but devoted all her energy to the cause which she served. She was a valuable member of the Council and the Executive Committee.

### **Appointment of Organising Secretary**

After the departure of Mr Prescott-Smith as Organising Secretary in January 1941 the post had to be filled, and the Executive Committee realised that it should not be too hasty in making a permanent appointment, considering the exacting nature of the position and the standard of administrative efficiency which the former holder of the office had maintained. A temporary appointment was thus made in the interim, namely Mr J. G. Kempff. He stayed for approximately six months, when Mr E. Hutton-Brown was appointed. The latter resigned early in 1943 and the position remained vacant until November 1943, when Mr D. J. van Wyk was appointed. In connection with this matter, the Chairman writes in the seventh biennial report (1941-1943) as follows:

"Early in 1943 the Council lost the services of its Organising Secretary and owing to war conditions it was not possible to make an appointment for more than six months. During that period the work of the Office was efficiently maintained by the Clerical Staff under the direction of the Vice-Chairman and a small committee of local members of the Executive. In November 1943 Mr D. J. van Wyk assumed the post of Secretary. Having had several years of experience in administration, Hospital and Social Work, Mr Van Wyk has already entered upon his task with enthusiasm."

### **Transfer of Head Office**

At this fifth biennial meeting of the Council, which took place at Durban in June 1939, the Johannesburg Society proposed that the head office of Council be transferred to Pretoria from Cape Town, in view of the fact that all government aid was administered from there.

When the motion was discussed, there was considerable opposition

from several members of the Council. The objection raised by the Rev. G. H. P. Jacques, representative of the S.A. Library for the Blind, was that too short notice had been given in connection with such an important matter. According to him there was also no reason why an immediate decision should be taken. He further stated "that Council had performed its work with such excellence and had got into its stride so well that it would be a pity to interfere with its machinery at this juncture".<sup>2</sup>

After further support for the Rev. Jacques' view from several members of the Council, Mr Tothill stated the case of the Johannesburg Society.

The motion was then put to the vote and the result was an overwhelming majority in favour of the office remaining in Cape Town. The minutes recorded the number of votes as 9 in favour of the transfer to Pretoria and 47 against. To indicate in what a serious light the meeting regarded the matter, the minutes continued as follows:

"The Chairman's announcement of the result of the voting was greeted with prolonged applause."

In spite of this almost emotional preference for Cape Town, the Council resolved to move the office to Pretoria barely two years later at its sixth biennial meeting in 1941. It had probably taken place at the beginning of 1942, for correspondence which was sent from the office during that time had the Pretoria address on the Council's letterheads.

### Activities of the Council

When consulting the available sources relevant to this period, it became clear that the cardinal questions with which the Council had concerned itself since its inception still required its serious attention. The most important were the problem of employment in open labour and the prevention of blindness. In other fields much had been done, especially with regard to general welfare work. The most praiseworthy effort in this connection was the establishment of a holiday home for the Blind by the East London Society (with the co-operation of the Council). There were also the usual representations to and negotiations with the Department of Social Welfare in connection with matters such as increased subsidies for the employees in workshops, better salary scales for instructors, more financial assistance for hostels and homes, etc. It seemed as if the Department, in the spirit of the provisions of the Blind Persons Act, was increasingly prepared to do its duty to the ut-

most, not only as regards the welfare aspect, but also in connection with the provision of facilities in the various workshops.

### **Employment in Open Labour**

In the period under consideration, namely the decade 1940-1950, the question of employment of the blind in open labour often held the attention of the Council and the Executive Committee, but unfortunately not much that was constructive resulted from it. From the records it was clear that everybody realised that something had to be done, but nobody seemed to know how to tackle the problem and who should take the lead. The following passage, taken from the minutes of the 52nd meeting of the Executive Committee, held in March 1949, illustrates this:

“As the Executive felt it was rather difficult for it to indicate how and by whom a campaign should be undertaken amongst employers in Commerce and Industry with a view to increasing the employment of blind people in the open labour market . . . it was resolved that a sub-committee be appointed . . . to consider ways and means of placing blind or partially sighted persons in employment in the open labour market.”

The National Council and its affiliated societies could not entirely be blamed for this state of affairs. There were certain factors which had an arresting effect on the employment of blind persons in open industry at that time. It is necessary that we pay brief attention to these.

Firstly it must be realised that up to the middle of the decade a world war was being waged which also affected South Africa in various ways. It must therefore have been a difficult task indeed to place blind persons in open labour; more so because the industries themselves suffered on account of war conditions.

Added to this was the fact that a person such as Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, who had been a most valuable direct liaison between the Council and the Government, was not available at the time. He had been appointed Director of Mobilisation during the war, and was commissioned to rehabilitate returned soldiers. After the war he represented South Africa on the Council for Social Welfare of the United Nations Organization. It was only after his retirement in 1952 that he again joined the S.A. National Council for the Blind. The absence of Dr Van Schalkwijk during this crucial period must be considered a serious handicap as regards the close link between the Council and those state

departments (e.g. Social Welfare, Education and Labour) whose assistance was indispensable for promoting the placement of blind persons in industry and in the professional field.

Another factor which affected placement was the circumstances under which the workshops were functioning at that time. The workshops were all still engaged in the process of consolidation. A few were still housed in old hired premises, and were engaged in the erection of new buildings. There was a problem with regard to personnel, especially instructors, who were difficult to find. Then, also, the workshops were concerned about their own expansion and it was quite natural that they would wish to retain their best workers in order to make the workshops as profitable as possible. Dr. P. E. Biesenbach, Superintendent of the Workshop for the Blind at Worcester, stated the case as follows:

“Placement work will, however, always remain a difficult task and good results can only be obtained if the respective blind societies are prepared to accept all the implications, both in principle and in practice. I grant that this is expecting very much of a workshop superintendent. His natural inclination would be to fill his workshop and increase the turnover.”<sup>3</sup>

A last factor which was not advantageous for placement was the fact that the general view was that managers of workshops were to be responsible for the placement of their blind employees. Even Dr Biesenbach advocated this. In this connection he continues:

“In the interests of the blind he (i.e. the manager) should curb his inclination and find outside employment for as many of his workers as possible.”

This was also the view of the Council, and is indicated in the terms of reference of a sub-committee (already mentioned) which had been appointed to investigate the question of placement. The paragraph in question reads as follows:

“That the sub-committee provide information to societies in regard to placement of blind or partially sighted persons in the open labour market.”<sup>4</sup>

It must be considered unfair that such an additional responsibility should have been placed on the shoulders of workshop managers. Furthermore, it was obviously not realised that placement is a specialised field which has little to do with the administration and organization of a workshop. In this connection it is interesting to note that the



Cape Town Society submitted the following resolution at the biennial meeting of the Council held in November 1946:

"That the S.A. National Council for the Blind should consider the appointment of a placement officer on the staff of the National Council."

After discussion it was referred to the Executive Committee for consideration. At a later meeting of the Executive Committee (March 1949) another sub-committee was appointed "to consider the advisability of setting up an employment bureau for the blind and partially sighted and to consider any other matters relevant to the placement of blind persons in the open labour market."

This sub-committee had already submitted a report to the Executive of the Council at the following meeting, which was held in October 1949. The report (which was submitted by the Chairman of the sub-committee) produced virtually nothing new. A disappointing aspect is that the Committee recommended:

"that it would be impracticable at the present time to establish a Bureau solely for the placement of blind persons but that this should best form part of the machinery of the Department of Labour for the placement of handicapped persons in general."

The sub-committee was probably influenced by an announcement by the representative of the Department of Labour that his Department had appointed twenty skilled officials who were stationed in the large centres of the country and who were concerned with the placement of young persons, but who also had the additional function of the placement of handicapped persons. Therefore it was recommended that the placement of blind and partially sighted persons should preferably form part of the State machinery which had been brought into being for this purpose.

The sub-committee further recommended that close co-operation between the blind and the Department of Labour should be established.

It was also recommended that a central register for employable blind and partially sighted persons should be kept in the office of the National Council, and that it should be at the disposal of the Department of Labour and other government organizations.

No mention was made in the minutes of the Executive meeting of

any discussion having taken place; it was merely stated that the report had been unanimously adopted.

This then was the situation at the end of the 1940-1950 decade as regards placement.

The above account may give the impression that the situation concerning placement of the blind in open labour was extremely alarming. This was not the case, however, as quite a number of blind persons had already been integrated into open labour at that time. This, however, had taken place chiefly on their own initiative.

In this connection mention was made previously of blind persons who had built up profitable business undertakings on their own, such as the Marais brothers in Worcester, Mr C. C. Church in Kimberley, Mr C. Marais, the electrician of Robertson, Mr T. Kruger, the basket-maker of Breede River near Worcester, as well as other cane workers in Paarl, Robertson, Hermon and elsewhere. Attention was also given to music teachers, piano tuners and organists who had been able to make a living in different parts of the country. To these must be added a small number of lawyers who had achieved outstanding success in their profession. Here and there placements in the industries were also reported.

As regards physiotherapy, in 1940-1950 there were already about a dozen physiotherapists either in private practice or on the staffs of hospitals. Blind teachers had been employed on the staff of the Worcester School for the Blind ever since it was first established, and at least one blind teacher had been appointed at an ordinary school near Bloemfontein, namely Mr John Tennant.

As regards telephony, the Worcester School for the Blind had begun the training of telephone operators in 1945 after negotiations with the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. In connection with this we find the following in the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 12 and 13 September 1945:

"Dr Biesenbach reported that the necessary equipment had been installed and that training was already in progress. The Union Education Department was prepared to subsidise this project and the difficulty now was not the training of telephonists, but the placing of them in suitable positions after completion of their training. . . . It is also suggested that the Government should set the example by employing trained blind telephonists on their various exchanges. The Government is very sympathetic but

when it comes to actual employment there are numerous technical difficulties and excuses."

A year later, at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 5 November 1946, the Organizing Secretary could report that the Public Service Commission was prepared to employ trained blind telephonists in conjunction with the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. This was a great step forward.

The training of telephone operators expanded when the Johannesburg Society announced at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 22-23 October 1947 that they had introduced facilities for the training of adult telephonists.

A matter relevant to the placement of blind persons in certain European countries was the compulsory employment of a percentage of physically disabled persons (1% to 3%) in an industrial enterprise (firm or factory) which had more than a specified number of workers in its employ. In the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 16 October 1944 one reads as follows:

"Dr Biesenbach suggested that a recommendation should go forward to the National Council asking it to adopt a resolution requesting the Government to enact legislation as soon as possible for the absorption into ordinary employment of a certain quota of physically disabled persons."

A proposal along these lines was put forward at the seventh biennial meeting<sup>5</sup> of the Council, and was unanimously approved. A similar proposal was again introduced at the ninth biennial meeting of the Council,<sup>6</sup> this time by Miss L. Beaumont Rawbone of the Cape Town Society. It was specifically requested that legislation be introduced on the lines of the Disabled Persons Employment Act (1944) of England in which compulsory employment of physically disabled persons is laid down according to a quota system.

A full discussion followed during which several speakers stressed the disadvantages and impracticability of the quota system. The proposal was rejected and in its place the following was approved by the meeting:

"In view of the fact that legislation on the lines of the Disabled Persons Employment Act of Great Britain does not now seem opportune in South Africa, this meeting of the National Council for the Blind is of opinion that a campaign should be undertaken amongst employers in Commerce and Industry with a view to in-

creasing the employment of blind people in the open labour market."

Investigations in connection with the application of the system have brought many deficiencies and abuses to light. For this reason it was never introduced in South Africa. It is our policy that the employment of physically handicapped persons should take place through persuasion rather than by legal enforcement.

Furthermore it had been experienced abroad that in the legislation the term "disabled" alone was used. This resulted in other categories enjoying preference. It was also found that very often firms had the names of disabled persons on their pay sheets, but did not in fact have them in their employ.

In virtually all the biennial reports of the Council up to approximately 1946, mention was made of the reluctance of industry and commerce to take blind persons into their employ. This was attributed to prejudice. Although uncertainty existed concerning the approach to the problem of placement by the National Council, attempts were nevertheless made to obtain employment for the blind. The following statement in connection with the question of prejudice already appears in the sixth biennial report of the Council (1939-1940):

"The Secretariat of Council interviewed upwards of 60 firms in Cape Town and suburbs with a view to securing employment, on trial and without remuneration, of registered blind persons, but met with no success. It is a matter of extreme regret that owing to the very strong prejudice in South Africa against the employment of blind persons in ordinary industry, the only avenue of employment open to them at present is basketmaking and, with negligible exceptions, piano tuning, mattress making, massaging and knitting."

It is a fact that a lack of knowledge still exists today concerning the true potential of blind persons. Through the years, however, much of the prejudice has disappeared as a result of the progress made in the field of service to the blind, as well as the involvement of the general public, but chiefly as a result of the achievements of the blind themselves.

### Placement — Views and Efforts by the Blind

An important aspect of placement, on which we shall dwell for a while, is the stirrings which took place among the blind themselves during the



decade under review. It is a fact that a strong feeling of independence existed amongst blind people at the time and they revolted against placement in sheltered employment. They realised, however, that in the early days (and for many blind persons this applies even at the present time) there was no other alternative. However, it became quite clear that the leaders amongst the blind at some time or other would come forward with their own organization to promote placement in open labour. This took place when the S.A. Blind Workers organization was founded on 26 October, 1946. A fuller report concerning the S.A.B.W.O. will be given later which will indicate that the organization, as it grew down the years, concerned itself with many other aspects of providing services to their fellow blind besides placement. The latter, however, remained their chief objective.

In this respect a state of affairs existed where the efforts of the blind themselves to promote placement ran parallel to those of the Council for a considerable time with hardly any points of contact. It is truly strange that no blind person so far had had a share in the Council's efforts in spite of the fact that this was a matter which so closely concerned the blind. The only case in which a blind person was involved in the matter of placement at that time was when Dr W. Cohen was invited by the sub-committee appointed to consider the establishment of a placement bureau to assist them in an advisory capacity.<sup>7</sup> We also find that the strong views expressed by certain blind people who were forced to make a living in the workshops met with no response at the meetings of the Council or the Executive Committee. What could the reason be? Firstly, it can be stated that, besides the Chairman, no elected<sup>8</sup> blind persons served on the Executive Committee for many years. Secondly, there was still a strong tendency among the sighted section of the population not only to act on behalf of their blind protégés, but also to think and decide for them. The process of emancipation of the blind had then scarcely begun. Consequently one can well understand that nobody on the Council had considered bringing in knowledgeable blind persons from outside to serve as co-opted members of such committees. In connection with this the following is illuminating. At the eighth biennial meeting of the Council held at Worcester on 6-7 November 1946, there was a strong feeling that the blind should become more involved in their own affairs. The minutes reported the following:

"Miss Watson, on behalf of the Cape Town Civilian Blind So-

ciety, moved: 'To add to the end of Section 6 of the constitution: The Council shall have the power to elect an advisory committee of registered blind persons, one from each of the five Provinces<sup>9</sup> and not necessarily members of Council, to serve the Council in an advisory capacity.'

Mr Fuchs seconded the motion.

After discussion, the motion was put and Council divided:

For the motion — 4

Against the motion — 27

The motion was accordingly negatived."

Besides the Chairman there were three blind persons present at the meeting.

To return to the question of placement in open labour and the involvement of the blind with it, it can be stated that in the 25th Jubilee Brochure of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization, which appeared in 1971, the matter received special attention since it was the chief reason for the establishment of the S.A.B.W.O. It describes inter alia how the organization was born out of the burning desire of the blind to secure a better livelihood for themselves. In his article entitled "A few aspects in connection with the development of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization" Mr E. J. J. Kruger writes as follows (page 23):

"Workers who could find employment in the open labour market were exceptionally rare. Since 1918, after the First World War, a few of them qualified in physiotherapy and also in law. Up to the beginning of the Second World War only three persons could obtain posts as telephonists. This then was the normal course of history: that the discontented individual would come into revolt against his circumstances, and would demand for himself a better future through his own organization.

The dissatisfaction among the workers in workshops for the blind . . . increased sharply during the Second World War. The right of existence and the dignity of the blind worker were at stake, which led to a feeling of humiliation. His dignity, it was argued, could only be restored through better opportunities for work which would lead to economic rehabilitation. During 1945 the discontent rose to a climax. This would eventually lead to the establishment of their own organisation in which sighted persons would not be allowed because offence was taken at misplaced sympathy and excessive charity."

The last sentence is enlightening, but the S.A.B.W.O. did not stop at this negative attitude because Mr D. C. Malan, President of the organisation at that time, stressed the more positive aims of the S.A.B.W.O.:

“Many employers were not aware of, or were prejudiced concerning the efficiency and capability of blind workers to work in the open labour market. This is, and has been, a great struggle indeed, because the main objective of the organisation was to find work for the blind, especially in the open labour market.”

Mr A. J. C. Swartz, in an article in the same publication of the S.A.B.W.O. with the somewhat unusual title “Blindness, a gift and a test”, connects the problem of placement with the gulf which exists between the sighted and the blind. Sketching the circumstances of the school-leavers during the twenties and the thirties he continues as follows:

“But what was the lot of the blind school-leaver? Full of pride and self-confidence, armed with a good and well-deserved certificate, and inspired with the highest ideals for a decent and profitable existence, he enters the wide world of prejudice against his human right of usefulness. His capabilities and self-respect are disregarded by a community which ascribes all power, rights and efficiency to the possession of sight . . . The same State which had encouraged education for the blind and had increasingly supported it has done nothing to offer the trained blind person a bearable existence. The same State has, as late as the thirties, put on record that, as regards workmen’s compensation, a blind person is 100 per cent incapacitated.”<sup>10</sup>

Mr Schwartz also supplied data relating to the salaries which were paid to the workers at that time, and which indicate how desperate their economic situation was.

It must certainly not be concluded from the above that the Council was indifferent to integrated placement and the economic problems of the blind. On the contrary, there is sufficient proof that the Council, by means of discussions, representations to State departments and industry, memoranda, reports of committees and addresses delivered at meetings regarded the matter in a very serious light. Still, it seems as if the necessary insight was lacking, possibly as a result of the absence of proper communication between the Council and the blind community.

This lack of communication cannot be laid at the door of one party

alone. Both are to blame for different reasons. The blind did not come forward to state their case in a positive way. This only happened after the S.A. Blind Workers Organization was established. Not only was this instrumental in putting the case of the blind in its right perspective to the sighted public, but it also contributed to a great extent towards helping the blind worker to take his rightful place in the economic life of the country.

In a later chapter, when the next period in the history of the National Council will be dealt with, we shall indicate how the establishment of a permanent committee for placement, with a placement officer on the staff of the Council, brought about a complete change for the better regarding the problem of placement. Noteworthy also is the fact that, as time went on, more and more leading figures from the ranks of the blind served on the committee, and that later not only the Chairman of the employment committee but also the employment officer was a blind person.

### **Prevention of Blindness**

A Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness had actually been established as early as 1939. This was at the fifth biennial meeting of the Council at Durban. Owing to the war no separate officer who would be specifically responsible for the organising of the Bureau was appointed. It was decided that in the meantime the work would be done through the office of the Council by the secretariat. It will readily be understood that on account of the Organising Secretary's copious duties resulting from the swift expansion of the Council's activities not much could be done in regard to the prevention aspect, apart perhaps from some measure of propaganda. This then was the situation up to the year 1944.

At the seventh biennial meeting of the National Council held in Cape Town on 17-18 October 1944 a report was submitted by a committee which had been appointed at the 39th Executive Committee meeting<sup>1</sup> to investigate the implications regarding the establishment of a Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. This action was taken because the original Bureau established in 1939 was considered defunct, since practically nothing constructive was done during the war years. The functions of the Bureau were briefly set out and included the following: collaboration with medical and health services, educational bodies, affiliated societies and public bodies; the promotion of legis-



lation; supplying information to the general public; research; prevention work amongst all social groups. It was also recommended in the report that a director assisted by a clerk be appointed. As regards finances, the following was recommended by the Committee:

"The salaries of the personnel and the maintenance costs of the Bureau to be borne by and form a normal part of the activities of the South African National Council for the Blind, financially supported by such grants and/or subsidies as may be obtained for the purpose from the Union Department of Public Health and Social Welfare."

There was a time lapse of more than a year, however, before the Bureau commenced its programme of action in January 1946. In as much as the Bureau constituted such an important department of the Council's activities, its establishment and activities will be reported on later.

### **Holiday home for the blind**

The establishment of a seaside home for the blind first came under discussion at the fifth biennial meeting of the National Council held on 21 and 22 June 1939 in Durban. On that occasion Mrs C. Cawston, representative of Our Own Blind Fund Association of Natal, read a paper on "Seaside Holiday Home for Blind Persons".

The suggestion was favourably received and Mr A. Kirstein, a blind person himself, stated that he was convinced that the blind would greatly appreciate such a holiday home and expressed the hope that the project would soon become a reality. During the ensuing discussion Mrs G. K. Nowlan, representative of the Johannesburg Society, suggested that societies should undertake the responsibility of paying half of the costs of holidays for the blind under their care.

After the discussion a motion was adopted to the effect that the matter should be referred to the Executive Committee for further consideration and implementation.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 7 and 8 March 1945 it was announced that the East London Society for the Blind had decided to establish such a holiday resort at East London. In the eighth biennial report of the Council (1944-1945) it was further announced that the City Council of East London had made an unoccupied building, which was formerly the Hillcoombe First Aid Hospital, available to the East London Society at a nominal rental of one pound per annum for a period of 10 years, to be used as a holiday home for the



Hillcoombe Holiday Home, East London.



Bowls are popular. South Africa has done well at international tournaments.  
There exists a National Association of Blind Bowlers.



blind. It was situated on the banks of the Nahoon River approximately eight kilometres from East London and near the sea. Aid was received from various bodies such as the Red Cross and the St John's Association in connection with equipment for the building. The National Council granted £1 000 (R2 000) at the outset for maintenance, and promised further financial aid.

The Hillcoombe Holiday Home for the Blind was opened on 17 May, 1946. The Organising Secretary, Mr D. J. van Wyk, attended the ceremony on behalf of the National Council.

It would appear, however, that the East London Society in course of time ran into difficulties to make ends meet as regards the maintenance of Hillcoombe. At one stage the Society had suggested that the National Council should shoulder the entire responsibility of the maintenance of the home. This was not a definite proposal and the matter was not discussed. Although the Council felt that it could not agree to this, it was not indifferent to the efforts of the East London Society and at a later meeting of the Executive Committee<sup>11</sup> it decided on a formula for regular annual grants. The generous aid given by the Council was chiefly on account of the awareness that the holiday resort would be at the disposal of the blind of the entire country and that the East London Society was thus actually rendering a national service. Later on a partnership agreement was concluded between the Council and the Society which was to ensure the survival of the resort.

### **Welfare Organizations Act**

A very important development regarding social welfare services in our country at that time was the passing by Parliament of the Social Welfare Organizations Act, 1947 (Act No. 40 of 1947).

It made provision for the registration of welfare organizations, and for the control of the funds collected by such organizations and their activities, which included also the approval of the constitution of each organization.

Furthermore, the Act made provision for the establishment of a National Board for Social Welfare Organizations, to whom certain duties and responsibilities were assigned.

This Board consisted of 24 members, of whom a quarter had to be social workers, one quarter persons who were involved in welfare work in the rural districts, and one half persons who were occupied with similar work in the cities. The ninth biennial report of the

National Council for the Blind states that Mr. D. N. Murray, the Honorary Treasurer of the Council, had been appointed Vice-Chairman of the National Board for Welfare Organizations.

The Act also made provision for the appointment of local welfare boards in any magisterial district, municipality or other area. The duties of these local boards were, amongst others, to provide the National Board for Welfare Organizations and any State department or local authority, with advice and to make recommendations in connection with applications for registration as welfare organizations.

The Minister could also appoint inspectors to examine the financial statements and other documents of a welfare organization.

This Act must be considered a step forward. It brings control and order into all social welfare work in the country, and by exercising absolute control over the raising of funds safeguards the public. For this reason no organization may distribute collection lists or launch any fundraising efforts before it can produce its registration number (this is the familiar W. O. number), which must also appear on its letterheads.

Since the establishment of the National Board for Welfare Organizations several members of the National Council for the Blind have served on regional welfare boards.

### **Monetary aid by the State**

It is certainly appropriate at this stage to give a brief resumé of the financial assistance supplied by the State in respect of the work done by the Council and the societies. Likewise the study of the situation regarding the granting of pensions to the various population groups will be interesting for the purpose of comparison later on. The main object of welfare work and the rehabilitation of the blind, which includes placement, must be to change pensioners into taxpayers. Instead of receiving from the State, they must be capable of contributing towards the state finances. A good criterion for this ought to be the rate at which the number of pensioners diminishes over a specified period. For the statistics to be reliable, it must be measured against the growth rate of the population.

The assistance, support and interest shown by the Department of Social Welfare runs like a golden thread right through the entire history of the National Council, and is a matter which was never overlooked by the Chairman in his biennial reports. This also applies to the Department of Health, especially after the Bureau for the Prevention



of Blindness had got under way. It is also significant that on various occasions the Secretaries for Social Welfare and Health represented their respective departments at Council meetings in person. The advantage attached to this was that they were able to give an immediate ruling in connection with representations addressed to them.

It is also worthy of note that with the change of government after the election of 1948 Dr. A. J. Stals was appointed Minister of Social Welfare, Health and Union Education, three departments with which the National Council was intensely involved. The Division for pensions came under the Department of Finance at that time, and on this account we find that the latter regularly sent a representative to Council meetings.

It is remarkable how the interest of the Department of Social Welfare had grown since the passing of the Blind Persons Act in 1936. The importance of legislation depends upon the fact that a Department, with the authority conferred upon it by the Act, can grant financial aid. Furthermore, if certain financial principles have been laid down periodic amendments can be made accordingly, often to the advantage of the organizations and individuals concerned. Thus we find that as a result of representations by the National Council the Department of Social Welfare was in a position to increase the pensions of individuals periodically, and could also raise the augmentation grants and subsidies to societies.

In the ninth biennial report of the Council the Chairman gives a résumé of the financial aid which is granted to societies by the Department of Social Welfare. This is chiefly for the following:

“The establishment and maintenance of hostels, homes, workshops and other places approved by the Minister for the reception or training of registered blind persons, and the remuneration of persons employed by such societies or the National Council for the purpose of conducting any such hostel, home, or workshop, or other place.”

According to the formulas which were in force in 1948 the subsidies ranged from 50 per cent for approved expenditure for general maintenance and running costs to 75 per cent for salaries of instructors and social workers. As far as capital expenditure was concerned subsidies were paid on the basis of “two thirds of the cost of purchasing, erecting, repairing and renovating as well as of the rental paid for buildings and 50 per cent of the cost of equipment”.

## Augmentation Allowances

Besides the abovementioned grants and subsidies augmentation allowances were paid to individual blind workers in workshops according to the grade in which they were placed. The allowances were further determined by the population group to which the person belonged.<sup>12</sup>

At the time a supplementary allowance was paid to workers in both the public and the private sector, in order to lessen the burden of the rising cost of living. This cost of living allowance was later consolidated in the salary structure.

## Pensions

The original Blind Persons Act of 1936 (Act No. 11 of 1936) made provision for the payment of pensions to two population groups only, namely Whites and Coloureds. The state department concerned made funds available for payment of ad hoc subsidies to Indians and Blacks until the Act was amended to include all population groups.

The application of a means test determined the amount of a pension or whether it would be granted at all. Regarding the amount of a person's income which would disqualify him from receiving a pension, many discussions took place at Executive Committee and Council meetings. Some members even urged that the means test should be abolished entirely, and that the pension should be regarded as a handicap allowance. All blind persons would therefore derive benefit from such a measure. The argument in favour of this was that a blind person, whatever his income may be, spends more than a sighted person on his daily needs. In those days many blind people objected to the term pension, because the usual connotation attached to the word implied old age or retirement. They regarded the use of it as another stigma. A. J. C. Swartz made this remark: "But why a 'pension'? For other people it would have been a subsidy or grant."<sup>13</sup>

In connection with the number of persons who had received pensions in the financial year 1947-48 and the amount which had been paid out, the following table was published in the ninth biennial report of the Council. It indicated the figures as they were on 31 March 1948:

	Total registered blind persons	In receipt of pensions	Not in receipt of pensions	Amount paid out R
Whites	2 296	1 144	1 152	102 100
Coloureds	2 136	1 596	540	
Asians	163	141	22	
Blacks	28 639	25 778	2 861	182 284
Total	33 234	28 659	4 575	284 384

### Alcoholics and mentally disturbed persons

Two other matters which occupied the Council's attention during the period were blind alcoholics and blind persons in institutions for the mentally disturbed.

In the minutes of the eighth biennial meeting of the Council held on 6 – 7 November 1946 the following proposal was submitted by Mrs C. Cawston on behalf of the Natal Society for White and Coloured Blind Persons. and accepted by the meeting:

“That this meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind considers that the time has arrived that representations should be made by the Council to the government for the establishment of a home for European and Coloured blind indigent inebriates.”

The Organising Secretary followed up to resolution by making contact with two organizations (in Natal and Johannesburg) which were involved in the rehabilitation of alcoholics. Both replied that they were not equipped to accommodate blind people.

After this a letter was sent to all societies for the blind requesting them to supply particulars of the number of indigent blind alcoholics in their areas.

According to the replies from the societies there were only eight cases of blind alcoholics in the country. The Executive Committee consequently resolved that this did not justify the establishment of a home. The matter was not raised again.<sup>14</sup>

As regards the mentally disturbed, much attention was given to this matter and informative statistics were collected.

The matter was introduced by Miss M. Watson on behalf of the Cape Town Society at a Council meeting held on 6 – 7 November 1946. The Executive Committee was requested to investigate the circumstances of

blind persons in institutions for mentally disturbed people.

The Organising Secretary wrote to all of the twelve institutions for mentally disturbed patients which existed in South Africa at that time for information concerning the number of blind persons in each. The data received was tabulated. The following is a summary of the statistics as laid before the meeting of the Executive Committee held 17 - 18 April 1947.

Number of blind patients in institutions for the mentally disturbed:

<i>Whites</i>		<i>Coloureds</i>		<i>Asians</i>		<i>Blacks</i>	
M.	W.	M.	W.	M.	W.	M.	W.
48	49	19	19	4	1	36	33
Total:		209					

During a discussion on the matter Mrs. Wiley of Bloemfontein informed the meeting that members of the Free State Society regularly visited the blind in the institution in their area.

It was then resolved that, should the Organising Secretary be in the vicinity of such an institution, he should visit the blind inmates in collaboration with the local society for the blind.

The case of blind persons in institutions for mentally disturbed persons was not raised again, although a committee for severely mentally disturbed blind persons was appointed.

## Conclusion

This brings us to the end of the Bowen period. In the next chapter a resumé of his life and work as well as an evaluation of the man, especially in regard to his concern for and support of his fellow blind, will be given. It is worthy of note that the news of his death together with a photograph and short sketch of his life appeared in the ninth biennial report, while he himself had signed the Chairman's report in the same issue. The fact is that he had signed the report on 5 June 1948, and had died on 27 June, three weeks later. His death occurred in Rhodesia, where he had been on holiday.

<sup>1</sup> The willow mentioned here must not be confused with the ordinary willow tree. The willow used for the making of baskets is procured from a bush or shrub, also called osiers.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of Council Meeting, June 1939.

<sup>3</sup> Paper: "Concerning the Problem of Employment" by Dr P. E. Biesenbach at the eighth biennial meeting of the Council held in November 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of Executive Committee meeting held in March 1949.

<sup>5</sup> Held October 1944 in Cape Town.

<sup>6</sup> Held 9-10 November 1948.



- <sup>7</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Executive Committee held on 6-7 October, 1949.
- <sup>8</sup> A blind person was co-opted to the Executive Committee.
- <sup>9</sup> The Cape Province is divided into two: West and East.
- <sup>10</sup> S.A.B.W.O.: Jubilee Brochure, page 16-17.
- <sup>11</sup> Meeting held on 22-23 October 1947.
- <sup>12</sup> Ninth biennial report of council (1946-47), page 25-27.
- <sup>13</sup> S.A.B.W.O. Jubilee Brochure, page 18.
- <sup>14</sup> Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, held 22-23 October 1947, page 13.

## CHAPTER 6

### ROBERT WALTER BOWEN

1888 — 1948

In the previous chapters reference was often made to the role played by Adv. R. W. Bowen in promoting the growth and development of the S.A. National Council for the Blind. As Chairman since its inception, he directed the Council through difficult times with insight and sound judgement. Apart from his outstanding contribution in this respect, on which it is not necessary to dwell any further, he distinguished himself in many other spheres and performed exceptional services to the community on various levels. His work and achievements on behalf of the blind were thus only one facet of his fruitful and active life. The fact that he, being blind, had had such an outstanding career and was able to achieve so much captured the imagination of the community and especially of the press in those days.<sup>1</sup> In reports about his activities and work reference was continually made to his blindness. The sighted world can, however, be forgiven for this, since he was the first blind person to have played such an important role in public life in South Africa. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that, as a result of his blindness, he received more attention than would have been the case had he been sighted. However, it is quite clear that it did not affect him, as he was too well balanced, with good insight into human behaviour. One report stated: "He is always referred to as the blind M.P.". It seemed as if the newspapers took pleasure in bestowing such a title on him.

His life can be divided into three phases. The first was the period before he became blind. The second was the advent of blindness and preparation in England for his life's work. The third was his return to, and professional career in, South Africa. If one follows the early course of R. W. Bowen's life, it is remarkable that, when a young man, his career had no connection with or preparation for his later life (after he

had become blind). As a young man he did administrative work in the employ of the Railways. This was very far removed from his later professional career as a lawyer. Can this be ascribed to his training and residence at St Dunstan's,<sup>2</sup> which placed him in a totally different milieu as a result of his blindness? Did his blindness thus indirectly lead to the discovery of his real capabilities and potentials?

He never failed to stress the importance of his sojourn at St Dunstan's and often expressed publicly his sincere gratitude towards the organization. On one occasion, referring in a speech to the role which St Dunstan's had played in his life, he said:

"The result was that blindness became less an affliction, more a handicap — less a calamity, more an opportunity."

This philosophy derived from St Dunstan's afforded him new insight so that he could make the necessary adjustment to life. He most certainly made the best use of the opportunities of which he spoke.

### **First Years<sup>3</sup>**

Robert Walter Bowen was born in Durban on 3 October 1888, and was educated at the Durban Boys' Model School, where he matriculated at a much earlier age than the average candidate.

Following this, he entered the service of the Natal Railways as a clerk. When the Union of South Africa came into being in 1910 he was transferred to Bloemfontein, and was later stationed in Johannesburg. After thirteen years of service in the Railways, he developed a strong impulse for adventure which led him to the diamond diggings near the Vaal River at Christiana in the Western Transvaal. While he was there, the First World War broke out. He enlisted in the army and at first did duty in South West Africa. At the end of this campaign, in July 1915, he joined the 2nd S.A. Infantry Brigade, which first served in Egypt and later in France.

### **Blinded — and thereafter**

The second phase of Bowen's life comprises the accident of his blindness on the battlefield and his residence and training at St Dunstan's, as well as his legal studies at Gray's Inn, London, and at Caius College, Cambridge University.

The events which led to the loss of his sight as a result of war wounds are narrated in the biography by Dr A. W. Blaxall.<sup>4</sup> The information was obtained chiefly from Mr (later Dr) Hugh Stayt<sup>5</sup>, who was with

Bowen on the battlefield and an eye-witness of the events which took place on that fateful day.

Towards the evening of 18 September 1917 various units moved along the Menin road near Ypres and took up their positions after dark in preparation for the battle which would take place in the course of a few days. It was a dreary evening and a soft rain had soaked their clothing. Everywhere there were bomb craters in which the men sought shelter. Throughout the night there was systematic bombing from the enemy lines which caused quite a number of casualties. It lasted until the following day, 19 September. With regard to what happened further, Stayt writes as follows:

"I noticed Bowen and four others had taken up a position on the lip of a shell crater. I and some of my pals were some 30 yards in front of them trying to keep dry under an old aeroplane wing. I heard the whine of a heavy shell. I was sure it would burst right on top of me, but it just passed and struck the five fellows behind me. I realised it was Bowen and his four companions who had got it. When I reached them, three were killed and two wounded. With some others he was bandaged and we helped him to a concrete pillbox used as company headquarters."

Stayt does not mention this in his letters, but he was the man who carried Bowen away from the firing line to a reasonably safe place, from where he was taken to the dressing station on a stretcher.

Not only was his sight destroyed, but further wounds resulted in his having to undergo plastic surgery. This necessitated a very considerable period of hospitalisation. Months after his admission to the hospital in Chelsea, London, a nurse told him that another South African had just arrived in the ward. Sergeant Bowen immediately recognised his voice. It turned out to be Hugh Stayt, who had been blinded by a bullet a few hours after Bowen. He was only seventeen years old at the time.

After Bowen had been discharged from hospital he was admitted to St Dunstan's. Here he followed the full programme, but it appears that he experienced problems at first with the choice of a suitable career. It was the policy of St Dunstan's at that time to test the rehabilitees in different directions, in order to determine where they would best fit in according to their abilities. We find thus that Bowen considered various possible vocations, for example physiotherapy, commerce, and certain forms of trades. At one time he even seriously considered poultry



farming, in which St Dunstan's also gave instruction. Then an offer came for him to study law, and he grasped the opportunity. In connection with his studies, we quote the following from a newspaper of March 1937 (probably the Cape Times<sup>6</sup>).

"Advocate Bowen . . . entered Grey's Inn as a law student. From there he went to Cambridge as a post-war undergraduate of Caius College (Cambridge University), gained both honours degrees of Law, and entered the Chambers of Mr D. B. Summervall, now Sir David Summervall, the present Attorney-General of England. While in Chambers he attended Professor Nurisen's lectures at the London University and sat for the Legal Examination of the Inns of Courts, when he was placed first and was awarded the Sir Abe Bailey Scholarship. He returned to the Union in 1922 and was admitted as an Advocate of the Cape Bar."

As regards his studies, the name of Eleanor Lillie Gillies should certainly be mentioned. She was his inspiration, and constantly encouraged him. They were married shortly before he left England in 1922 to practise as an advocate in South Africa. She was born in New Zealand and had lived with her grandmother, as both her parents had died when she was still very young. She had gone to England for her education and at the outbreak of the war she joined the V.A.D. As such she assisted in the ward where the blinded soldiers were accommodated. Their friendship grew, and Dr Blaxall describes their relationship as follows:

"Eleanor Gillies showed him that depth of understanding and deep affection which draws the best out of any man, and with a blind man makes him realise how necessary such a companion is to the completion of his own life."

It is also interesting to mention that she was the sister of Sir Harold Gillies, the famous plastic surgeon of Harley Street, London, who performed a series of operations on Bowen.

After the conclusion of his studies he decided to return to South Africa to practise as an advocate.

### **Advocate and Parliamentarian**

The arrival of Advocate Robert Walter Bowen in Cape Town as the first blind lawyer in South Africa, was important news in the press. He was admitted to the bar on 26 August 1922, and in connection with this the Cape Argus reported as follows:

"It was the leader of the Bar himself, Advocate Close K.C., M.L.A. who formally moved the admission of Mr. Bowen, who was then piloted to the desk where he subscribed to the customary oath, after which his Lordship (Judge Gardiner) tendered his congratulations."

Scarcely a few months after he had opened an office at 4 Wale Street, Cape Town, he was already well known. This was naturally to his advantage as far as the growth of his practice was concerned; nevertheless, his popularity sometimes caused him some embarrassment. On account of his pleasant disposition and willingness to help, numerous people, especially ex-soldiers, flocked to his office for aid. In the blind advocate they recognised a man who could help to obtain justice for them. He concentrated chiefly on criminal cases, and through these he gained recognition. With regard to this aspect of his practice (which also gives one an insight into Bowen the man) Blaxall<sup>7</sup> writes as follows:

"Professional friends who at first found him puzzling, at times slightly annoying, came to have profound respect for his skill and courage. It is natural that they find explanation for his success from the more obvious features of his life and practice. Some of his colleagues discussed this with me and suggested three reasons why he developed the particular practice which led him to be regarded as the special friend and advocate of the poor and outcast. In the first place everyone found him absolutely open and frank . . . A second factor of importance was his ready wit. His greatest friends admit that there were times when his persistence became almost exasperating . . .

Finally all his colleagues agreed that his phenomenal memory was more than a mere asset, it commanded unstinting respect. Advocate Austin Sutton recalls that on one occasion he quoted without reference almost the whole of a complicated and lengthy report with complete accuracy."

He was thus not a legal man who remained in his chambers and busied himself mainly with paper work and consultations. He was too much of an outgoing personality, who did most of his work in the courts where he could match his skill against that of his opponent, in spite of the latter being a sighted person.

Two years after he had begun to practise as an advocate, in 1924, he

entered public life and became a member of the Cape Provincial Council. He represented the Gardens constituency.

Five years later, at the time of the parliamentary election of 1929, he was nominated as the candidate for the constituency of Cape Town Central. His opponent was a member of the now defunct Labour Party. The name of this constituency was later changed to Green Point. He won this seat and retained it until his death in 1948.

The most outstanding piece of legislation for which he was responsible was the Blind Persons Act which was passed by Parliament in 1936 (Act No. 11 of 1936). He was also periodically responsible for amendments to the Act, mainly to raise the pensions and to lower the amount of income by which the means test was determined.

Another interesting measure which he tried to steer through parliament as a private member was connected with the so-called "tot" system, which he tried to have removed or at least modified. According to him this was in the interest of the Coloured people on the farms. The weight of the opposition he received was too strong, however, and he failed to achieve his goal.

He was often mentioned in parliamentary press reports for his excellent memory, as well as for his recognition of human voices. The Natal Mercury reports as follows:

"Though deprived of the support of notes or manuscript, Advocate Bowen may develop into one of the "orators" of the House of Assembly. He is one of the best speakers among the new and young blood the last general election introduced to the Union Parliament . . . Mr Bowen is getting to know members of Parliament and the political journalists by their footsteps and voices. He knows the voices of all the members of General Hertzog's Cabinet in parliamentary debate . . . He asks for no privileges in the House and is on his feet with remarkable alacrity when he wants to 'catch Mr Speaker's eye'."

### **Other interests**

Advocate Bowen took an active interest in the activities of ex-soldiers and often delivered addresses at official functions and gatherings. His favourite organization of course was St. Dunstan's. Whenever the opportunity arose he paid tribute to the Association, not only for what it had done for blinded soldiers, but especially for what it had achieved in forming public opinion regarding blindness. For many years he was

the provincial head (Old Bill) of the M.O.T.H.S. organization, which consisted entirely of ex-soldiers. He officiated at Dellville Wood memorial ceremonies and services on numerous occasions, and took part in parades. He did not confine himself to the Cape Peninsula, but often appeared in other centres as well. He also took part in functions in connection with the Cape Corps.

He played an active role in the Sons of England Society, and was the Grand President of that organization from 1944 to 1946.

The extent of his reputation is shown by the numerous gatherings of divergent organizations which he addressed; to mention but a few: the congress of the S.A. National Council for Child Welfare, Rotary Clubs, the Cape Community Chest, Toc H, the Educational Society of the University of Cape Town, and the Church Lads' Brigade. This does not include the numerous times when he acted on behalf of the blind, and especially the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

The most important social service which he performed, however, was on behalf of his fellow blind people. His heart and soul was in this work. The history of the S.A. National Council for the Blind up to 1948 is also the history of his multifarious and dedicated services to the blind of all population groups in South Africa.

This has previously been fully described. He declared on one occasion that the two most outstanding achievements of the National Council under his leadership were the passing of the Blind Persons Act and the foundation of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.

The Athlone School for the Blind must of course be mentioned, as its foundation and development were chiefly due to his efforts. The history of the Athlone School, which is recounted elsewhere, is evidence of this.

With regard to the establishment of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society Mrs Bowen especially played an important role. As Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind Adv. Bowen displayed a keen interest in all the organizations for the blind in the country. Thus, for example, Dr P. E. Biesenbach, Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind at that time, wrote:

"His interest in the Worcester School for the Blind, where I was principal, was very genuine, and where the interests of the school clashed with some blind agency or other I could always rely on Mr Bowen for his objective ruling as Chairman."<sup>8</sup>



## His views on blindness

Advocate Bowen was often requested to address meetings or to write articles about his blindness. He never hesitated to speak freely about it. He was always honest and direct, but was careful to explain that the views expressed were his own and that attitudes differed from person to person. He also explained that a difference existed between a person born blind and one that had become blind. He was already an adult (thirty years of age) when he lost his sight and he retained a strong visual memory. This is not possible in persons born blind. They have to depend much more on their senses. When he was a student, for example, he took down his lecture notes in ordinary handwriting and these were later rewritten in braille, or read to him by a friend or an amanuensis. (Those were the days before tape-recorders were in use).

On the other hand, however, the emotional shock which follows sudden blindness can bring about far-reaching consequences for such a person, which may cause serious damage to his personality. With regard to this Bowen wrote the following in an article in the *Outspan*:

"In the first hour of my realisation that I would never again see, I drank all the bitterness and anguish it was possible for me to feel. I came out of that hour with a determination to face facts as they really are, and make the best of all that remained."

To illustrate that it is not possible to generalise about blindness, he made the following assertion:

"The disability of blindness is as relative a question as the privilege of sight itself."

And further:

"It would indeed be an awful tragedy if the fact of one's blindness was always a conscious dominating fact in one's mind. I go for days at a time without consciously appreciating the fact that I am blind."

Yet we find the following significant confession:

"I have often been very annoyed with myself for not being able to see, very often amused, and very often decidedly angry with those who wish to assist me in their way to a better understanding of things as they really are. But I am never depressed."

We now take leave of this aspect of his life with appreciation for his candour and sincerity as well as for his well-balanced outlook on life, which should serve as an example for many young people.

## Bowen the ordinary man

What kind of man was Mike Bowen? (That is how he was known to his friends.) He was certainly full of the zest for life, enjoyed social communication, had a fine sense of humour which caused him to laugh at himself, and was able to counteract restrictions brought about by blindness without any unnecessary frustrations. It is told that he was an exceptional bridge player, loved "cowboy" stories, and thoroughly enjoyed an afternoon at the race course. Coupled to what has already been written above, we can deduce that he had a versatile personality which enabled him to adapt himself to all circumstances and persons.

Miss A. F. Gillies (niece of Mr Bowen) tells this amusing anecdote about the parrot which he possessed. In the afternoons on his arrival home the bird greeted him enthusiastically and a conversation usually took place between them. So if there was nobody at home when he arrived he amused himself by talking to the parrot. But one day the parrot disappeared and consternation and grief reigned. Even notices in the "lost" columns brought no results. Quite a while later a lady from Sea Point rang (Bowen lived in the Gardens, several kilometres away) and said that she had found a parrot on a bench along the esplanade which continually called out: "Vote for Bowen!" His master had taught him these words during a former election. Bill and Mike were thus united once more.

He always prided himself on his missionary background. His father had emigrated from England in 1879 as a member of a regiment which took part in the Zulu war. After the end of hostilities Andrew James Bowen remained among the Zulus for several more years, and taught them various skills, such as the making of bricks and the building of houses, but he also brought them the word of God. Therefore Blaxall writes:<sup>9</sup>

"A strong religious atmosphere always prevailed in the Bowen family, and it was doubtless his father's generous interest in the welfare of the Zulu people among whom he found himself that led Mike frequently to say that he was proud to regard himself of missionary tradition."

In this connection Dr P. E. Biesenbach relates the following anecdote:<sup>10</sup>

"In 1937 we were having an Executive Meeting in Port Elizabeth. These meetings were usually opened with prayer and we were

somewhat surprised when a member got up right at the very beginning of the meeting and moved that this practice be discarded. Mr Bowen's reaction left no doubt as to how he felt. He did not even wait for the speaker to finish what he had to say, asked for no seconder, dropped his fist on the table and said: 'Not as long as I am Chairman. Biesenbach, will you open with prayer?' And that was the end of it."

One certainly has the right to wonder what his attitude towards Afrikaans and the Afrikaans-speaking section of the population had been as a member of the Provincial Council and a parliamentarian. During that time (1924-1948) there were many stirrings on the political scene. Certain political parties, such as the Labour Party and the Dominion Party, had disappeared, as well as the old S.A. Party as a result of coalition with a certain section of the National Party. The battle smoke of the First World War had not yet disappeared entirely when there were already distinct signs of a second great holocaust in the offing. Emotions ran high. Towards the end of the Second World War the war atmosphere was still strong while the country struggled to return to normal. Bowen's role during that period is portrayed in numerous press cuttings in the scrapbook, and it can categorically be said that his actions and pronouncements never played off the one section of the nation against the other. In fact one gets the impression that he purposefully strove towards national unity. In his speeches he often mentioned the fact that just as many Afrikaans as English names appear on war monuments of soldiers who had died on the battlefield. The following are a few extracts from a speech which he made in Cape Town on 17 July 1938, on the occasion of the commemoration of the battle of Dellville Wood on 16 July 1916:

"Out of the 150 000 South Africans who represented this Union of ours on foreign battlefields, no distinction can be drawn because of the language they spoke or the particular section of the community from which they sprang. English- and Afrikaans-speaking citizens were taken and hammered out into one homogeneous unit."

"Our nation is made up of two main sections of our people. There was no monopoly of patriotism shown by any one section."

"It seems to me that we must maintain for all time the truly

national spirit which was shown by our country during the period when self-sacrifice was expected."

It seems as if he specially chose this day to convey to his audience, and possibly also to a wider circle, his profound conviction of the urgency of national unity. It was never possible to doubt his intense love for his country, South Africa.

Advocate Bowen enjoyed a very happy married life, and the sudden death of his wife in 1938 must have left a great void. Her family often came to visit. One such person was Miss Ailie Gillies, a niece of Mrs Bowen. She took the management of the Bowen household upon herself after the death of her aunt, but she was not only responsible for the housekeeping, as she herself declared:

"I was Mr Bowen's eyes, chauffeur, housewife, and companion until his death. I learned much about the courts and found myself summing up the cases, travelling extensively in the Union and reading 'cowboy' stories aloud during the long train journeys, for a train journey to Mr Bowen was a relaxed holiday."

In spite of his balanced outlook and the full and successful life which he led, which most assuredly afforded him great satisfaction and contentment, he also experienced periods of stress. In regard to this Dr Blaxall mentions that the long series of operations which he had to undergo to build up his face (nose, cheeks, etc) left its mark, which caused attacks of physical pain periodically throughout his life. This then brought on serious conditions of tension. It was a very well kept secret, which only a few people shared with him. It undoubtedly exhausted him in body and soul, and led to his comparatively early demise.

Although his death can be considered to have been sudden, he had suffered a collapse about six months previously, towards the end of 1947, as a result of high blood pressure. The doctor prescribed complete rest and he tried to adhere to this as far as possible. He was obliged, however, to carry out his usual parliamentary duties at the beginning of the year. But the session was not long, as an election was scheduled for May of that year (1948). He was spared the campaign, however, as he was elected unopposed.

### **Last days**

Towards the middle of June 1948 he went on holiday with the Gillies family to the Victoria Falls. He had looked forward to this with keen



anticipation. On the train he contracted a cold, which developed into pneumonia. After a day in bed at the hotel a doctor was called in and he was taken to a hospital in Livingstone. His condition deteriorated and on 27 June 1948 he passed away. He was cremated in Durban and a memorial service was held in Cape Town. Tributes of esteem were received from all over the country and from many sections of the community.

There are two separate tokens of appreciation for the great services which he rendered to the blind of our country. The one is the memorial chapel (with the organ) which was erected at the Athlone School for the Blind, and the other is the institution of the R. W. Bowen Medal by the S.A. National Council for the Blind. This medal is periodically presented to persons who have rendered lifelong service to the cause of the blind.

A bust which had been made of Advocate Bowen by the famous English sculptress, Clare Sheridan, was presented to the Athlone School for the Blind by Miss A. F. Gillies and has been placed in a niche in the memorial chapel.

The National Council reveres the memory of Robert Walter Bowen.

- <sup>1</sup> Mrs Bowen compiled a series of newspaper cuttings which were continued after her death by Miss Gillies. These valuable documents not only illustrate Bowen's role in the community, but also give a good insight into the general trends of thought in the political, cultural and social spheres of the twenties, thirties and forties. The present writer was granted perusal of these cuttings through the kind co-operation of Miss A. F. Gillies.
- <sup>2</sup> St. Dunstan's, which has been referred to previously, is a large organization which was founded in England during the first world war (1914-1918), for the rehabilitation and training of blinded ex-soldiers.
- <sup>3</sup> Data about his life, work and thoughts were gained from various sources. Firstly can be mentioned the short biography by A. W. Blaxall: *Blindness his Servant*. Then also, P. E. Biesenbach contributed an article about him to Brailorama. Numerous facts were gathered from the aforementioned scrapbooks, articles in magazines of St. Dunstan's and other organizations, and personal information supplied by Miss A. F. Gillies and other persons.
- <sup>4</sup> *Blindness his Servant*, pages 6-7.
- <sup>5</sup> The letters which Stayt wrote to Mr Blaxall are preserved in the book of cuttings which are in Miss A. F. Gillies' possession.
- <sup>6</sup> This cutting was found in the book of cuttings, but the source is not indicated.
- <sup>7</sup> *Blindness his Servant*, pages 11-12.
- <sup>8</sup> From an article in Brailorama, about the middle of 1969.
- <sup>9</sup> *Blindness his Servant*, page 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Brailorama: *Uit die pen van die Gaal* (Dr P. E. Biesenbach).

## CHAPTER 7

### A NEW ORGANIZATION PATTERN — I

*1949 to 1961*

The period which is being dealt with in this chapter, namely the twelve years from 1949 to 1961, brought about a new approach to the provision of services for the blind. It was the time when specialist committees which would direct the various facets of the National Council's work were appointed. This development brought about a more effective organization pattern, which had already been started when the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness was established. Further to assist the committees the constitution of Council made provision for the ad hoc appointment of technical advisers who were not necessarily members of Council. Besides the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, the following special committees<sup>1</sup> were instituted:

- Committee for Rehabilitation and Placement<sup>2</sup>
- Committee for Literature, Education and Research
- Committee for Blind Blacks<sup>3</sup>
- Public Relations Committee
- Finance and General Purposes Committee
- Committee for the Partially Sighted.

Besides the special committees a number of sub-committees were also established which can be considered to be permanent. They are the following:

- Legal and Constitution Sub-committee
- Gaps in Services Sub-committee
- Sub-committee for International Relations
- Sub-committee for Imfama (magazine).

In this context should be mentioned the establishment of two Divisions of Council which play an important role in services to the blind of two specific population groups. They are:

- Division for Coloured Blind
- Division for Indian Blind.

The two Divisions as well as the permanent sub-committees were established during a later period in the history of the National Council, and will thus be dealt with in a following chapter.

The question may arise why 1961 has been specially chosen as the closing year of this period. Firstly it can be mentioned that 1961 was the year when Dr Louis van Schalkwijk died while serving as Chairman of Council. It was not only as Chairman, however, that he had served the Council so excellently. He had been concerned with its foundation and gave direction to its development over a period of more than thirty years. His death must thus be considered to mark the end of an era in the history of the South African National Council for the Blind.

In the year 1961 other important events also took place which were of special interest to the Council and the blind as a whole. In 1961 Dr P. E. Biesenbach retired as Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind. Apart from the pioneer work which he had done in the interest of education of the blind, he was also a founder member of the Council and for many years intimately involved with it. His successor was Mr Theodore Pauw, who was destined to play an important role not only in the field of education but also in the broad framework of services to the blind and especially the National Council. A detailed report on this will follow later on. It can also be mentioned with regard to the year 1961 that it was also the year in which the Organising Secretary of Council at the time, Mr D. J. van Wyk, died. He had served the Council in this capacity for nearly two decades. In his place Mr S. K. Wentworth, who had then already been the Director of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness for fifteen years, was appointed.

With these introductory remarks we return to the circumstances which prevailed at the death of Advocate Bowen.

At the ninth biennial meeting of the National Council held in East London on 9-11 November 1948 Rev. A. W. Blaxall was elected Acting Chairman following the death of Advocate R. W. Bowen. In terms of the constitution Mrs C. Cawston, as elected Vice-Chairman of Council, should have taken the Chair, but she was unable to attend the meeting. In such a case the constitution decreed that the meeting itself should elect an Acting Chairman until such time as the election of officers for the following biennial term should take place. The choice fell on Mr Blaxall.

The first item on the agenda was reference to the death of Adv.

Bowen, after which the Acting Chairman introduced the following motion:

“This Ninth Meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind hereby unanimously resolves to minute the deep sense of loss sustained by the death on the 27th June, 1948, of Robert Walter Bowen, Member of Parliament, Chairman of the Council since the first meeting held in Cape Town, in March 1929. Through the intervening years Mr Bowen proved himself a wise guide, a sound counsellor, an indefatigable worker, and — above all — by the example of his personal victory over blindness he inspired the blind of all races in our land, as well as those who work for the prevention and conquest of blindness.

In particular this meeting records that the fact that South Africa has on its Statute Book a Blind persons Act is largely due to the tenacity of Mr Bowen, and the able manner in which he guided the negotiations at which the Bill was drafted, as well as the way he led the discussion in Parliament. As a result of this legislation, thousands of sightless people in every corner of our country today live a happier and fuller life.”

Thereafter the Secretary for Social Welfare, Mr G. A. C. Kuschke, delivered the opening address. In his speech Mr Kuschke quoted figures of the number of handicapped persons of all race groups in the country, and the expenditure incurred by the state (8 per cent of the total) for their support. This figure also included financial assistance to ex-servicemen who at that time were in dire need of care. These circumstances caused the Department of Social Welfare to appoint a committee to investigate the question of sheltered employment. This was the so-called Williamson Committee, the report of which appeared in 1950. One of the terms of reference specially included financial aid to, and control over workshops for the blind.<sup>4</sup>

It should be mentioned here that at this meeting two important resolutions were adopted. The first was an urgent representation to the Department of Union Education to make provision for the education of partially sighted children. A memorandum would be sent to the Department, followed by a deputation consisting of members of the Executive Committee.

The second resolution concerned welfare work amongst blind Blacks. Mr Blaxall made a strong plea for a comprehensive programme for the development of welfare work among blind Blacks in



the four provinces. This would also include work in the "protectorates and Southern Rhodesia".

In connection with this it was also resolved to make representations to the authorities concerned to establish schools for blind Blacks. Blind Black children were allowed to enrol at the Athlone School for the Blind at Bellville, Cape, at that time.

When the election of officers took place the Rev. A. W. Blaxall was elected to the Chair and Mr J. Hamilton Russell, M.P., as Vice-Chairman. He was the representative of the Athlone School for the Blind. Mr D. N. Murray was elected treasurer.

The four members of Council who were elected to serve on the Executive Committee were:

Dr P. E. Biesenbach, Mrs M. Marks, Miss J. E. Wood and Mr V. H. Vaughan.

The five members elected to represent the provinces (two for the Cape Province) were:

Mr A. B. W. Marlow, Miss A. M. Rogers, Mrs V. Fleming, Mrs M. Myers and Mr W. H. Green.

We shall now deal with the establishment and activities of the special committees of Council.

### **Committee for Employment and Rehabilitation**

Previously it was reported that at a meeting of the Executive Committee held in March 1949 a sub-committee had been appointed to investigate "the feasibility of establishing an Employment Bureau for blind and partially sighted persons". The sub-committee presented its findings to the Executive Committee of Council in October 1949 and recommended that such a bureau should not be established. Possibly both the sub-committee and the Executive Committee had sufficient confidence in the professional section of the Department of Labour to cope effectively with the placement of blind and partially sighted persons. The establishment of a bureau or committee for placement as well as the appointment of a placement officer was thus not realised. This was the position for the following three years, i.e. from 1949 to 1952.

At the biennial meeting of Council held in Grahamstown in 1952 the establishment of a "Committee for Employment" was again raised by the chairman of the sub-committee which had investigated the matter in 1949. The Chairman of Council (Rev. A. W. Blaxall) was unwilling

ling to allow the matter to be discussed again. However, on account of pressure brought to bear upon him, he allowed the chairman of the sub-committee to state his case. He was allowed "only three minutes" to do so.<sup>5</sup> After the urgency of the establishment of a Committee for Employment had again been stressed no discussion followed and it appeared as if the matter, temporarily at least, was dropped.

However, at a meeting of the Executive Committee held in Cape Town on 1 and 2 April 1954 a comprehensive memorandum was presented by Mr V. H. Vaughan "on the establishment of a Bureau for the Employment of Blind Persons".

In the introductory paragraph the writer made the statement that, in spite of the appointment of various committees over a number of years to investigate the matter as well as the establishment of a section in the Department of Labour for the placement of handicapped persons, "the problem as a whole remained unsolved". Just as the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness showed progress only after the appointment of a director, the writer considered that this would also be the case with regard to the suggested Bureau for Employment of Blind Persons, Therefore he proposed that such a bureau be established and that a director be appointed.

It is also interesting to note that in the memorandum it was proposed that the director should not only concern himself with the individual placement of persons in "outside jobs" but also pay attention to the "wide field of the economic and occupational adjustment of the blind in our country". On this account it was advocated further that the bureau should, inter alia, give assistance to prospective university students (including the supply of study material in braille and guidance in connection with the choice of subjects and related matters). Advice and aid should be given to those blind persons who wished to conduct their own business affairs. This would include "the testing of ability, skill, aptitude, intelligence, personality, conditions of stress, etc.", the study of types of work and factory conditions where blind people would be taken into employment. Research was also advocated. The memorandum ended with an exposition of the attributes which a director of the bureau and his assistant should possess.

In the light of experience over the years, it seems as if the project as described in the memorandum was too ambitious, although it contained certain elements which could have been applied with good results.

After the memorandum<sup>6</sup> had been discussed it was resolved firstly that the scheme as set forth in the memorandum be approved, secondly that the Department of Labour be approached to subsidise such a bureau, and lastly "that a sub-committee consisting of Dr Van Schalkwijk, Messrs Vaughan and Van Wyk submit a statement at the following meeting of the Executive Committee concerning particulars of the scheme with special reference to the financial implications".

Probably the idea of a bureau did not meet with the approval of the Executive Committee, for at its next meeting, held on 27-28 September 1954, it was resolved that a "Sectional Committee for Employment" be appointed. The resolution read as follows:

- "(a) That a Sectional Committee be appointed to assist the Secretary as far as placement of blind persons in the open labour market is concerned;
- (b) That this Placement Committee be given power to act in regard to the appointment of a placement officer;
- (c) That the Department of Labour be asked to subsidise expenses attached to the post of placement officer;
- (d) That all matters in connection with the placement of blind persons which have been broached in this meeting be referred to the committee."

The election of the committee (officially known as the Employment Committee) took place at a meeting of Council held on 29-30 September 1954, directly after the meeting of the Executive Committee. Five members were elected, and later five more were co-opted by the committee itself. Mr J. H. van Niekerk was nominated as Chairman. He was one of the representatives of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization, and one of the three blind members who were co-opted to serve on the Executive Committee. This proved to be a very fortunate choice, considering that he, as a blind person, was following a successful career in the open labour world, both as a piano tuner and a businessman. In addition to this he was dexterous with his hands and would often demonstrate certain operations to prove to employers what blind people were capable of doing. He had a good insight into the circumstances of his blind colleagues, knew their strengths and weaknesses, and exerted himself with much enthusiasm to get them placed in employment. He regularly accompanied the employment officer to investigate new avenues of employment and was himself actively concerned with placement. At the first conference which was held on industrial

ophthalmology in November 1958 in Johannesburg, he delivered an informative address on the rehabilitation of the blinded worker. After having served as Chairman of the Committee for ten years, and six years thereafter as an ordinary member, he had regrettably to resign because of personal business commitments. He will be remembered as the person responsible for laying the foundation for the placement of blind persons in the open labour market as far as the S.A. National Council is concerned.

The first two meetings of the newly established Employment committee were held within a short time of each other, namely on 6 and 12 November 1954.

It was resolved at these meetings that it be recommended to the Executive Committee to appoint an employment officer as soon as possible. A memorandum was submitted which set out the duties of such an officer. The possibility of obtaining a subsidy on his salary from the Department of Labour was also discussed. It was then resolved that representations to the Department be made accordingly.

After the Organising Secretary of Council had been notified of this resolution he immediately made representations to the Department of Labour for a subsidy on the salary of the placement officer.

In connection with this the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of 3 March 1955 read as follows:

“The Secretary reported that representations both verbally and by letter have been made to the Department of Labour for the subsidisation of the salary etc. of an employment officer. These representations were followed up by an interview with the Minister of Labour in Cape Town on 28 February. The interview with the Minister of Labour was attended by the Chairman of Council, Mr M. C. Botha, M.P. for Roodepoort, and the Organising Secretary. The Minister was sympathetic but would not take a decision until the matter had been dealt with by the Rehabilitation Council and he had been advised by that body.”

The Rehabilitation Council was a body which had been established by the Minister of Labour, and consisted of nominees from various social welfare bodies.

It would appear, however, that the Department of Labour was not in favour of subsidising the post of employment officer.<sup>7</sup> “Dr Wright, the representative of the Department of Labour, gave full particulars of negotiations between the Department of Labour and commerce and



industry in regard to the question of employing the blind in the open labour market . . . The efforts were met with a certain amount of success. Dr Wright drew the attention of the meeting to the Placement Committees of the Department of Labour in the larger centres, which he stated as becoming increasingly effective in the work that they are doing, and that recently they have been handling more and more cases of persons who are blind or are about to go blind.”<sup>8</sup>

After a long debate on the matter it was eventually resolved that “the appointment of an employment officer be referred back to the Employment Committee with the request that in pursuing the matter further, they have regard to the discussions which had taken place at this meeting of the Executive Committee”.<sup>9</sup>

It thus appears that grave doubts existed among the members of the Executive Committee as to what line they should take. For more than 25 years (since the foundation of the Council), the placement of blind persons in open labour was a burning question which caused the Council a great deal of perplexity because so little progress had been made in all that time. On the one hand the financial aspect caused anxiety, because it seemed as if no State subsidy was forthcoming. On the other hand the prospects as outlined by the Department of Labour caused quite a number of members to decide that the matter should be left in abeyance, so as to see what success the Department would have. Other members were more in favour of agreeing to the request of the Placement Committee to appoint an employment officer immediately. There was a strong feeling that, considering that placement of blind persons was a specialised field, the responsibility therefore should be undertaken by an expert appointed in the Department of Labour. If this did not happen, not much placement of blind persons in open labour would take place. The strong standpoint taken up by the representative of the Department of Labour, however, was the decisive factor which influenced the members to adopt a waiting attitude in the prevailing circumstances. Consequently it was resolved that the matter be referred back to the Placement Committee, with a fairly broad hint that a waiting attitude should be adopted.<sup>10</sup>

This, however, did not occur. At the following meeting of the Executive Committee held on 2, 3 and 4 November 1955 the first report of the Chairman of the Employment Committee was tabled, in which it was stated that the Committee had resolved:

“That irrespective of whether a subsidy is received from the De-

partment of Labour on the salary of the Employment Officer, such an official be appointed, and that representations be made to the Departments of Labour and Social Welfare for the payment of a subsidy."

Furthermore:

"The post of Employment and Field Officer was advertised and thirteen applications were received. After elimination only one remained. This applicant on being invited to Johannesburg for the interview withdrew his application. It has now been decided to re-advertise the post."

The report was approved without much further ado by the Executive Committee. This was somewhat surprising, since the latter, at its previous meeting, had serious doubts about the wisdom of appointing an employment officer. Even the Department of Labour, through its representative, did not raise its voice in protest.

The remainder of the Chairman's report indicated that the Committee had already in the first year of its existence set about its task with enthusiasm and dedication. The following were some of its achievements and proposed projects:

1. The compilation of data to ascertain the extent of the employment problem of blind White persons in South Africa. In connection with this, a pilot survey was made of those (a) employed in open labour, (b) in sheltered employment, (c) unemployed, (d) over the age of 60 years.
2. The compilation of a complete register of applicants for employment.
3. Investigation as to the possibility of establishing workshops equipped with lathes, assembly benches and other machinery in factory areas where blind persons could be employed as well as trained.
4. The procuring of information from overseas concerning the placement of blind persons.
5. The placement of blind persons in open labour. In connection with this, it was reported that during the year 17 out of 23 persons were placed in employment with the aid of (a) the Department of Labour, (b) the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, (c) the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization, (d) private initiative.
6. Investigation into the "efficiency and usefulness of blind physiotherapists in so far as electronic apparatus is concerned". This mat-

ter was laid before the S.A. National Council for the Blind by the Director of Hospital Services of the Transvaal. In this connection the Chairman of the Employment Committee reported as follows: "As certain blind physiotherapists felt that their capabilities had been doubted, the matter was referred by the Blind Workers' Organization to the Employment Committee, which Committee recommends that the Sub-Committee previously appointed, investigate the matter in collaboration with the newly established Advisory Council for Blind Physiotherapists. The Advisory Council consists of four blind physiotherapists and members of the S.A. Society of Physiotherapists". The Sub-Committee consisted of Dr L. van Schalkwijk, Dr C. W. Wright (Department of Labour) and the Organising Secretary.

Amongst its other duties it appeared that the Employment Committee was also responsible for the screening of candidates for the course in physiotherapy at the R.N.I.B. in London. A screening committee was appointed upon which the physiotherapy profession was represented.

In one of his later reports the Chairman called attention to the fact that serious problems had arisen with regard to the employment of blind telephone operators following the installation of flicker lights on the new telephone boards. A technical sub-committee was appointed to negotiate with the engineers of the post office regarding the possibility of making certain alterations in order to make it possible for blind telephone operators to manipulate the new boards.

At that time (1956) there was a strong movement for the establishment of a centre for the rehabilitation of persons blinded in later life. Consequently we find that the Employment Committee recommended to the Council that full particulars concerning the objects of such a centre and the costs involved be submitted to the Department of Social Welfare with a view to obtaining a subsidy. The Council adopted a resolution to this effect.

Considering that the activities of the Employment Committee had expanded, it was resolved by Council at its 1956 meeting that the name of the Committee be changed so as to indicate its wider field of activity. It would henceforth be known as the Committee for Rehabilitation, Training and Employment.<sup>11</sup> The word training was probably inserted because the Committee zealously campaigned for the establishment of a technical training centre for blind artisans, from where they would

then be placed in industry. It was envisaged that such a centre would form part of an existing workshop. This project, however, never became a reality. Discussions at first took place with the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind, who were unwilling to co-operate,<sup>12</sup> and later with the S.A. Blind Worker's Organization. The latter also considered the scheme to be too ambitious. The result was that the word "training" was later deleted from the name of the Committee.

### Appointment of Officer

After the person who had been appointed to the post of placement officer had resigned before he assumed office, the post was again advertised and from a large number of applications received, Mr D. J. Kocks was appointed. He should thus be considered to be the first placement officer on the establishment of the National Council. He assumed duty on 1 July 1957. Unfortunately he did not remain long and left the service of the Council on 15 August 1958. However, various developments took place during his term of office, a few of which should be mentioned here. It must be stressed that the individual placements and projects were often the joint efforts of different bodies. Thus we find the following statement in the Chairman's report covering the period 1957 to 1958:

"In collaboration with the Blind Workers' Organization, the Department of Labour, the Lighthouse Club for the Blind, and the Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association, 33 European blind persons were placed in the open labour market, and followed up."

Various new avenues of employment for blind persons were explored. One of these was film splicing for blind women. In connection with this the Chairman remarked: "It is interesting to note that these blind ladies are working considerably faster than their sighted predecessors, in fact, the overseas job rate on this specific line was achieved for the first time in South Africa by two of these blind girls."

Considerable attention was given to the placement of blind Blacks in open labour. Valuable assistance was obtained from the Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind at Ezenzeleni near Roodepoort, where a number of blind Blacks were trained for the packaging industry. Several were then placed with packaging firms.

A fairly extensive scheme was also started for the employment of blind Blacks as seasonal workers on tobacco farms in the Potgietersrust area.



The possibility of appointing blind persons as interpreters in courts was also investigated. It was found, however, that it could only be done on a part-time basis. As far as could be ascertained this did not become a reality. Such interpreters were also required to perform other tasks for which sight was essential.

Considering that the chief avenue of employment for the blind was telephony, and certain problems were encountered, it was decided to arrange a conference on the training and employment of blind telephonists. Interested organizations and State departments were invited to send representatives.

The meeting took place on 4 October 1957 in Johannesburg. The following were represented:

- The S.A. National Council for the Blind
- The Department of Education, Arts and Science
- The Department of Labour
- The Department of Posts and Telegraphs
- Worcester School for the Blind
- Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind
- Pretoria Society for Civilian Blind
- Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind
- S.A. Blind Workers' Organization.

The fact that the above bodies, which included three State departments, had sent representatives, indicated the seriousness with which the matter was regarded at the time. A greater awareness had developed in both the private as well as the public sectors in connection with placement and therefore also the integration of blind persons in the community.

Because the holding of the conference emanated from the Committee for Rehabilitation, Training and Employment, its Chairman, Mr J. H. van Niekerk, took the Chair. The following is a synopsis of the matters which received attention:

The minimum requirements for a qualified telephonist, screening and testing of candidates for training, issuing of proficiency certificates by the General Post Office, bilingualism, knowledge of braille and typing, appearance and temperament of the person, methods of training. New developments in connection with switchboards were again discussed, and in what way they would affect the future of the blind telephonist. Furthermore, it was resolved to hold a continuation con-

ference in November 1957 at the Worcester School for the Blind, where attention would specifically be given to training methods.

On 12 February 1958 a consolidated report on both conferences was issued. It contained the resolutions which had been passed in connection with the standard of training, the academic qualifications required, the training methods and the minimum load on a switchboard which should be managed by the candidate. An indication was also given as to what form the proficiency certificate should take. It was further announced that a manual would be compiled which would serve as a guide for training purposes.

### **New placement officer**

After Mr Kocks' departure on 15 August 1958, Mr J. J. H. Muller was appointed as placement officer. He assumed office on 1 October 1958 and held the post until 6 March 1961.

A matter which received a great deal of attention from the Employment Committee was the establishment of regional committees in centres where there were societies for the blind. Such regional committees would then work in close co-operation with the head committee in Pretoria.

In this connection Council passed the following resolution at its meeting held in October 1956:

"That in order to stimulate and co-ordinate the placement of the blind in the open labour market the Employment Committee is instructed to assist in the formation of local employment committees in places where blind welfare organizations are established."<sup>13</sup>

The first regional committee was established in Cape Town, probably on 12 June 1958. It proved to be very active.

At a meeting of the Cape Town Committee (named the Local Employment Committee) held on 8 July 1958 the following officers were elected:

Chairman: Dr L. van Schalkwijk

Deputy Chairman: Mr G. Schermbrucker

Secretary: Miss A. F. Gillies

The Cape Town Committee resolved to appoint a Survey and Placement Committee which would function as a sub-committee of the local employment committee. This Sub-committee, which was probably in charge of actual placements, consisted of eight persons and had its own

Chairman. Mr Schermbrucker was nominated as convener of the first meeting of the sub-committee, and it can be assumed that he was also elected as Chairman, for all correspondence with the head committee in Pretoria was conducted by him. Also the reports on the activities of the regional committee were sent by him.

This Committee did excellent work, to judge by the number of placements made and general follow-up work which was done.<sup>14</sup>

A similar regional committee was established in Pretoria by the local Society for the Blind, which also did good work, and which co-operated closely with the head committee. In Johannesburg a placement committee was established, but it was administered by the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind, and functioned separately from the Committee for Rehabilitation, Training and Employment. Efforts to establish regional committees in Durban and Port Elizabeth failed.

At the 14th biennial meeting of the National Council, held on 15-17 October 1958, it was resolved to establish a Division for Employment and Rehabilitation. This replaced the Employment Committee. With regard to this it can be mentioned that the word "training" was left out of the name of the Division, probably because no progress had been made with the training centre and the project had been abandoned.

It is clear from the minutes and reports of the Division for Rehabilitation and Employment that its chief function was placement, whatever other objectives it might have had in view. In this respect the Division was very active. The case of each person was thoroughly investigated before he was placed, and after placement the necessary follow-up work was done. At meetings of the Division reports were submitted concerning each person individually, and if his circumstances justified it, his case was fully discussed.

At that time the majority of blind persons in open labour were employed as telephonists, but much attention was also devoted to possibilities of placement in industry. In this connection the Employment Officer, together with the Chairman, made an extensive survey of avenues of employment which appeared to be suitable for the blind in factories in the large centres of our country.

The Division also paid attention to obtaining suitable posts for physiotherapists where it was deemed necessary. Actually, as has already been mentioned, the Division was deeply involved in various aspects of the training of physiotherapists at the London School of Physiotherapy. This concerned matters such as screening, problems

with the financing of their studies, correspondence with the London School about problems of a personal nature, and other similar circumstances. Physiotherapy as a profession for blind people has a long and interesting history, since blind physiotherapists had already started to practise in our country in the early twenties. This was the only form of employment for which overseas training was required. It is still the case today, although efforts have often been made to start a training centre in this country, but this has proved to be an impracticable proposition.

During this period a beginning was also made to pay serious attention to the placement of blind Black men. In this respect the Division depended largely on the co-operation of the Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind. A person who performed excellent service in this connection was Mrs G. Gowie, the wife of the then Manager of the Society. She was co-opted on to the Division. That the Division regarded the matter in a serious light is borne out by the fact that a resolution had been passed which stipulated that the new candidate for the post of Placement Officer should also attend to the placement of blind non-white persons.

The Division was also made responsible for control over the newly established Rehabilitation Centre. There was indeed a centre committee as well as a house committee, but the admission of candidates to the centre, the progress of rehabilitees, their discharge and eventual placement rested with the Division. Because rehabilitation was such an important facet of services to the blind, a separate report on the centre will follow later on. Rehabilitation is a unique aspect of the objectives of the Council, and the centre played an increasingly important role in the lives of many blind persons throughout the years. From a small beginning in an ordinary dwelling house with one part-time rehabilitation officer it has grown to an organization accommodated in suitable premises with a professional personnel of eight.

If one considers the activities of the Division one realises that the S.A. National Council for the Blind was by no means a mere co-ordinating body. This was often a source of concern to the more conservative members of Council and the Executive Committee. Their argument was that the National Council could not deal with individuals, since it was the duty of the affiliated bodies to care for the individual blind person. It became very clear, however, that by maintaining such a policy throughout, an efficient service could not be supplied to our



blind community. It could be argued that our societies for the blind should amongst their other duties be responsible for promoting employment in open labour; but it was generally felt that this was asking too much of them, since it was such a specialised field. Therefore the National Council wisely resolved that all forms of service of a national character should be managed by the Council itself by means of its standing committees and sub-committees. This also applied to its rehabilitation services. One cannot really expect that each society for the blind should establish such a centre, although rehabilitation should be included in its programme.

Then there is still the service to blind persons who are geographically or otherwise out of reach of a society or organization for the blind.

A pertinent example of this was the case of a newly blinded person of nineteen years of age residing at Lichtenburg, who was brought to the attention of the Chairman of the Division for Rehabilitation and Placement.<sup>15</sup> The Placement Officer visited her when she was in the Johannesburg General Hospital and handed her the forms for admission to the Rehabilitation Centre. She had a younger sister who also needed rehabilitation. Because some time had elapsed without any reaction from them, the Chairman asked permission to incur the expenditure that would enable him and the Employment Officer to visit the parents at Lichtenburg.

When the matter was discussed a member of the Division opposed the request "as the Division had no authority to recruit such cases for admission to the Rehabilitation Centre". After the matter had been fully discussed, it was resolved that the Chairman and the Placement Officer be allowed to proceed to Lichtenburg. It was further decided to recommend to the Executive Committee that cases should be investigated at places where no affiliated society or organization for the blind existed. The recommendation was approved by the Executive Committee.<sup>16</sup> This was a clear indication that there was a distinct departure from the narrow interpretation of the Council's policy of being merely a co-ordinating body.

In the fourteenth biennial report of Council (1956-1958), the Chairman, Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, gave a survey of the expansion of the National Council's field of activities, and made pertinent references to the co-ordinating aspect. After a summary of the original objectives of Council which were in force at its foundation, he continued thus:

“Since then, and more particularly during the last decade or more, the Council has been obliged to undertake services which bring it directly into contact with the blind, or to put it differently, to launch projects which directly serve the blind, such as (to mention a few) projects which serve to prevent blindness, including arrangements for corneal grafting, machinery for placing suitable blind persons in ordinary employment, domiciliary facilities for rehabilitating the blind, more particularly the newly blinded, and organisational arrangements for importing and selling suitable equipment and articles for the blind. These tasks have been undertaken in terms of the Council’s constitution which empowers it to initiate projects under two specified circumstances: When the projects are of too major a nature to be undertaken by individual societies and serve a Union-wide need, and secondly, when a local organization has not the financial resources or is for other reasons unable or unwilling to provide the service.”

This inevitable expansion of the Council’s activities was approved as a matter of course by most members of Council. However, when a movement was started later to expand this function of individual service by Council in such a way that it could take the form of an Institute, voices were raised, protesting that such a step would affect the autonomy of the various affiliated organizations. More about this will be reported at a later stage, seeing that there were also resolutions to amend the constitution effectively.

We now end this report on the activities of the Division until the end of the period under review (1961). This also saw the resignation of the Employment Officer. Later, when the following period of the Council’s history is dealt with, the Division will begin with a new Employment Officer who would in various ways introduce a new phase of activities of the Division.

### **Committee for Braille, Education and Research**

The Committee for Braille, Education and Research developed from the original “Braille Committee for Bantu Languages” which was established at the biennial meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind held in October 1950 at Kimberley.<sup>17</sup> This Committee concerned itself exclusively with devising braille systems for the five main Black languages, viz. Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Northern Sotho and Southern

Sotho. After most of the technical work in this connection had been completed, it was felt that the Committee should receive a much broader assignment so as to include matters relating to the braille systems of the official languages as well as research in connection therewith. Thus we find that at a meeting of the Council held 16 to 18 October 1956 the Committee for Braille, Education and Research was formed with the following as its first members:<sup>18</sup>

Mr W. Cohen (Chairman)

Mr A. W. B. Marlow

Mr Joh. C. Pauw

Mr E. J. J. Kruger

Mrs M. Kruger

Mr J. H. van Niekerk

Mr V. H. Vaughan

The first meeting of the Committee was held on 28 October 1957. Already at this meeting it was announced that the braille system for Sepedi-Tswana and South-Sotho had been finalised and were being tested for possible adaptations and alterations by the respective schools. Since the schools for blind Blacks were under the auspices of the Department of Education, Arts and Science at that time, the Department was notified of the developments. At a latter stage a consolidated report on the braille systems in the five most important Black languages, namely Zulu, Xhosa, Sepedi, Tswana and South-Sotho, was forwarded to the Department with the recommendation that the systems be officially approved for use in schools for blind Blacks. Furthermore, the Committee was of the opinion that, in order to make the testing of the systems more efficient, it was essential that some books in the braille systems of the languages be transcribed. Mr E. J. J. Kruger of the Transcription Bureau of the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization (later Braille Services) offered to transcribe two books in each of the five Black languages at the approximate cost of £50 (R100). It was resolved to recommend to the Executive Committee that Mr Kruger's offer be accepted.

The question of the establishment of a second Braille printing press<sup>19</sup> was broached. The minutes state that three memoranda on the matter were submitted, namely from Dr W. Cohen, Mr Joh. C. Pauw (Worcester) and Mr E. J. J. Kruger (Transcription Services) respectively. The matter was fully discussed and it was resolved that a conference be convened by the National Council, consisting of delegates from the vari-

ous schools for the blind, interested State departments, the S.A. Library for the Blind, the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization and two or three regular braille readers to "discuss the availability and production of braille literature".

The conference was held on 18 March 1958 in Cape Town. According to the report which was submitted to the Executive Committee<sup>20</sup> the conference was attended by thirty representatives of various organizations. The reason for this large number of interested persons must be attributed to the fact that the conference was held on the day before the beginning of the 74th meeting of the Executive Committee of Council. Apart from the representatives of the National Council and the Committee for Braille, Education and Research, there were representatives from five schools for the blind, two Education Departments, the S.A. Library for the Blind, the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization, the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind, the Lighthouse Club for the Blind and the Worcester Braille Printing Press. At least ten braille readers were present. It was thus a very representative group of persons who were involved in all facets of the use and production of braille. On account of indisposition the Chairman of Council, Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, could not attend the Conference. In his absence Dr W. Cohen was unanimously voted to the Chair.

The following were the most important matters which arose from the discussions:

- (1) The question was raised of making books which are read by only a very small group of persons available by the Library for the Blind. The representative of the Library explained that no provision for such persons could be made. Attention was also drawn to the necessity of building up a reference department as well as a students' section at the Library. In order to bring this about more voluntary transcribers would be needed.
- (2) Reference was also made to the "lamentable shortage of Afrikaans books in Braille". The S.A. Library for the Blind had only 197 titles at its disposal. Mr Johan Pauw informed the conference that the Worcester School for the Blind had approximately 500 Afrikaans titles on its shelves but the school "was not prepared to take over the functions of the lending library". In connection with this Mr Kruger of the Transcription Bureau of the S.A.B.W.O. stated that this organization would be willing to transcribe Afrikaans books into braille, and then to place them at the disposal of the Library



for the Blind, provided that the necessary funds were forthcoming.

- (3) The Chairman informed the conference that the braille systems for Zulu/Xhosa, Sepedi/Tswana and Southern Sotho had been completed. It was pointed out, however, that as in the case of all braille systems, these systems would also have to undergo an evolutionary period. It was generally felt that the printing of braille books in Black languages should at first be confined to school books until such time as the systems had been put to the test and adaptations had been made.

- (4) In connection with the chief reason for convening the conference, namely the question of whether a second braille printing press should be established, the report states as follows: "The conference is unanimous that an additional braille printing press is not necessary at this stage, considering that the Worcester School for the Blind is prepared to consider the printing of all books in braille when the demand for a large number of copies exists." It would also mean books for Black schools, according to Mr J. van Eeden of the Worcester Braille Printing Press.

The problem thus once more arose as to what procedure should be followed in the case of books when the circulation was very small. The conference was of the opinion that the Transcription Bureau of the S.A.B.W.O. should be expanded in order to supply books in braille for lending by the S.A. Library for the Blind. This was followed by a resolution to the effect that an application should be made to the Department of Education, Arts and Science for the subsidisation of the Transcription Bureau with a view to expansion of the service.

- (5) Several matters of a general nature were discussed at the conference, such as the possibility of printing "solid-dot" braille, the best method for the packaging of braille books, the development of tape in the place of the talking book, investigation into the various kinds of braille writing machines and apparatus, the acquisition of parts for these machines, and the distribution of information among the blind by printing the newsletter of the National Council in braille.

The Executive Committee approved all the recommendations made at the conference and it was left to the Committee for Braille, Education and Research to put the resolutions into effect.

The conference must be regarded as an important milestone in the

history of the provision of braille literature. It was felt that the production of braille, especially for adults, including the university student, was inadequate. This was also true of braille books in Afrikaans.

At the meeting of the Committee for Braille, Education and Research which followed the conference, attention was given to the various matters which had been raised. In this connection the first priority seems to have been the recruiting of transcribers especially for the transcription of Afrikaans books into braille. As regards the transcribers of English, the Library had the services of quite a number of efficient braillists, but the intention was to increase the number.

In spite of serious efforts to obtain Afrikaans transcribers the campaign was unsuccessful. The stumbling block appears to have been the learning of braille without proper tuition. In this connection it should be mentioned that both the Transcription Bureau and the Library insisted on a high standard of braille. This could only be achieved by conducting efficiency tests both in English and Afrikaans.

Initially it was resolved that English braillists should pass the efficiency test of the Royal National Institute for the Blind before they could proceed with transcription work. The S.A. Blind Workers Organization made the services of an experienced braillist available for conducting the efficiency test in Afrikaans braille.

When the R.N.I.B. later notified the National Council that they were not prepared to conduct the transcribers' tests any longer, the Committee for Braille, Education and Research resolved that the time had come to conduct the tests themselves. The Committee was convinced that expert braillists could be found in our country to act as examiners and moderators, who would uphold the required standards.

At a meeting of the Committee held on 30 May 1959 it was resolved that the Committee constitute itself as an Examination Board and initiate a transcribers' examination.

Subject to the approval of the Executive Committee, or if need be the National Council itself, the following examiners and moderators were appointed:

Mr J. P. van Eeden — Chief examiner

Miss C. E. Aucamp — Co-examiner

Miss M. Watson — Moderator for English

Mr V. H. Vaughan — Moderator for Afrikaans.

It was also resolved that the Examination Board would appoint additional examiners for braille in the various languages of the Black

people should the need arise. It was further resolved that when the Examination Board had been officially constituted, certificates would be issued to successful candidates by the National Council.<sup>21</sup>

This step must be considered as one of the main achievements of the Committee's work. The high standard of braille which is found in our books today must be attributed to the introduction of the efficiency tests. The two examiners, acknowledged experts in the field, are today still the same persons as twenty years ago and this continuity has in itself contributed to the fact that braille of the highest standard only is produced in South Africa. The original two moderators have been replaced by Mr J. R. Solms, also recognised as a leading braille expert in this country.

The Committee for Braille, Education and Research also decided to promote proficiency and general interest in braille reading. It therefore resolved to organise a national braille reading competition. A sub-committee with Mr E. J. J. Kruger as Chairman was appointed to organise the competition. According to the rules the competitors would be divided into different categories, namely two for scholars and an open section. As regards language, the rules made provision for English, Afrikaans and bilingual reading. Regional competitions would be held beforehand and the winners would then compete on a national basis.

Because adjudicators were appointed from the general public, among whom was the then Director of the S.A. Broadcasting Corporation, Mr Gideon Roos, the competition aroused widespread interest, and it was even arranged that some of the prizewinners would be heard over the national network of the radio in a topical broadcast. In connection with the reading competition the Chairman of the National Council, Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, writes as follows in the 15th biennial report of Council (1958-1960):

"The competitions were open to adults of all races and to all schools, and proved to be popular and received substantial publicity. Attractive prizes were given, and in addition there were floating trophies, whilst all competitors received appropriate certificates . . . There were regional and final competitions, and quite candidly, speaking as an adjudicator and an ex-Inspector of Schools for the Blind, I was surprised at the excellent performance of the finalists. Poems by Byron and Theo Wassenaar were read unseen with the same fluency as one would expect from a

practised sighted reader. I should add that adjudicators included V.I.P.s such as Mrs Fagan, wife of the ex-Chief Justice, and Mr Gideon Roos of broadcasting fame."

This competition was repeated a few times at intervals of approximately two years, but was discontinued later as a result of the vast organization which it entailed. Today braille competitions are still held by schools and other bodies, and certainly serve a good purpose, but they are not held on a national basis.

Since so many matters of a purely technical nature had been laid before the Committee for discussion it was resolved to recommend to the Executive Committee that a General Braille Committee should be established. This was approved and the terms of reference were drawn up. The Committee would occupy itself initially with the finalising of the braille systems for Black languages and would then give attention to matters pertaining to braille in the two official languages. As indicated in the terms of reference, contact would be continued with international organizations, such as the World Braille Council. The Committee would keep itself informed about developments, especially with regard to mathematics and science.

The Department of Education, Arts and Science was notified of the establishment of the General Braille Committee, and the Department declared itself prepared to send a representative to meetings.

The first meeting of the General Braille Committee was held on 12 December 1959.

The work of the part-time Transcription Bureau of the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization increased to such an extent that the question of establishing a full-time service was raised. It had to be decided whether the S.A.B.W.O. should undertake the project in partnership with the National Council, or proceed on its own, but with financial support from Council. After much deliberation it was resolved at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the S.A.B.W.O., which took place on 4 July 1961, that a fully equipped Braille Transcription Bureau be established, which would be known as Braille Services.

It was also decided that the new organization would be controlled by a committee consisting of seven members: four from the S.A.B.W.O. and three from the National Council. Further decisions were taken regarding the appointment of personnel, the procuring of equipment and methods to finance the project. The latter would include representations to the Department of Education, Arts and Sci-



ence for a subsidy and a request to the National Council for a grant of R2 000. An appeal would be made for donations. The Management Committee and the Honorary Director (Mr E. J. J. Kruger) immediately began to look for accommodation.

As early as the next meeting of the Committee for Braille, Education and Research, held on 24 October 1961, the Honorary Director of Braille Services could report that three offices in the Grand National Building, Rissik Street, Johannesburg, had been procured, that a large donation of office equipment had been received, that Crab machines for the writing and duplicating of braille had been ordered from England, and that a full-time braillist, namely Miss A. van der Spuy, had been appointed. She would assume duty on 2 January 1962. Other essential personnel would be appointed later.

At the following meeting of the Executive Committee of Council held on 24 to 26 October 1961, Dr Cohen, Chairman of the Committee for Braille, Education and Research, reported fully on the establishment of Braille Services. He announced that work would be undertaken for schools, individuals, the National Council and the South African Library for the Blind. The Council's magazine would also be printed in braille by Braille Services. Thereafter the following resolution was adopted:

"that the Council guarantees a grant not exceeding R2 000 per year to Braille Services, subject to reconsideration by the Executive Committee in October 1962."

In this way Braille Services came into being. The organisation played an important role in the provision of braille-literature to the adult blind of the country. Its further development will receive attention when the establishment and activities of the S.A.B.W.O. are dealt with.

We have now arrived at the end of the period under discussion. In the next chapter the rest of the history of the Committee for Braille, Education and Research will be told.

### **Committee for Blind Blacks**

Soon after the founding of the National Council, the situation with regard to the blind Black community received the serious attention of Council. When, for example, the blind Persons Act of 1936 was not applicable to blind Blacks, and they could not be considered for pension benefits, the National Council immediately made representations to the then Department of Native Affairs for financial assistance. These

efforts were successful and a considerable sum of money was allocated annually for assistance to blind Blacks by the abovementioned Department. This continued until 1944 when pensions were paid out to them in terms of an amendment to the Pensions Act. Later, in 1962, when amendments to the Blind Persons Act were made, pensions were paid out to them in terms of the latter Act.

Assistance was also given to blind Blacks in other fields, such as in connection with the prevention of blindness and the provision of education. It is true that there were no separate schools available at that time, but Black scholars were allowed to enrol at the Athlone School for the Blind, Cape Town. In 1937 further action was taken on their behalf when the Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind was established. In 1936, a society with similar aims was founded in Natal. It can be stated that various existing societies for the blind also attended to the needs of the blind Blacks in their areas, and admitted them to their workshops.

As regards the National Council itself, we find that the first real effort to act in the interests of blind Blacks was a resolution adopted at the ninth biennial meeting of Council, held on 9 to 11 November 1948 in East London. The resolution was submitted by the Chairman of Council, Rev. A. W. Blaxall, on behalf of the Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind.

It read as follows:

"That in the opinion of the Council the time has come to work out a comprehensive programme for the development of blind welfare work among Africans in the four provinces. That African personnel should be trained by a staff of trained welfare workers."

This matter was followed up by the Executive Committee. A committee was appointed with the Rev. A. W. Blaxall as Chairman. The name of the committee was: "Committee on the Development of Education and Blind Welfare Among Africans".

The Committee submitted regular reports on its activities to the Executive Committee. These mostly concerned efforts which were made to establish schools for blind Black children. Mention was also made of problems experienced with the tracing and care of blind adults. No fixed programme of action came into existence.

At the 11th biennial meeting of the Council held on 24 and 25 September 1952 it was resolved to change the name of the committee to:

Committee for Bantu Blind. The following were appointed as members: Rev. A. W. Blaxall (Chairman), Mr W. Cohen, Mrs M. Marks (Port Elizabeth), Dr L. van Schalkwijk, Mrs H. Wiley (Bloemfontein), Mrs F. M. Blaxall, Mrs V. K. Fleming (King William's Town), Mr A. B. W. Marlow, Mr V. H. Vaughan.

The Committee's first report was presented to the Executive Committee at its meeting held in March 1953. The following are a few of the most important matters emanating therefrom:

It was announced that a grant was made available by the National Council to a teacher employed in an ordinary school for Blacks, to undergo training at the Athlone School for the Blind. The training would take place with the object of establishing schools for blind Blacks. There were already movements afoot for establishing schools for blind Blacks in the near future in specifically zoned areas such as the northern and eastern parts of the country<sup>22</sup> — hence the necessity for the timely training of teachers to provide personnel for the schools.

According to later reports by the Chairman of the Committee<sup>23</sup> it appeared that a large number of applications had been received from which two candidates were chosen. It was resolved that it would be better to train two persons for six months each, instead of one for a full year. The first candidate started the course in January 1954 and the second in July 1954. Both finished the course successfully and returned temporarily to their schools to wait for appointments when the schools could be established.

A second important announcement concerned the establishment of a department for deaf-blind at the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf at Ezenzeleni. The project was a combined effort by the two institutions, namely the School and the Society. At that stage there were five deaf-blind persons under the age of 21 years and three above 21 years. All of them were educable or trainable. The Committee recommended to the National Council to grant financial assistance to the project, seeing that the teacher (at that time Mrs F. W. Blaxall) did not receive a salary from the Government. There were negotiations, however, with the Department of Education, Arts and Science with regard to the matter. Financial aid was also needed for the salaries of two assistants.

The question of the establishment of a workshop for Black women at King William's Town was raised. According to information received from the local Society, correspondence regarding subsidisation had already taken place with the Departments concerned. The Committee

undertook to arrange an interview with the authorities with a view to speeding up the matter.

Regarding the establishment and subsidisation of schools for blind Blacks, it was reported to the Executive that a committee had been appointed by the Department of Education, Arts and Science (the Grobelaar Committee) to investigate the future of education for blind Blacks, which would include the establishment of schools.

At each subsequent meeting of the Committee for Blind Blacks the matter was broached, but each time the outcome was disappointing, namely that the report had not yet been released. At the biennial meeting of Council held in October 1956, however, Dr C. M. van Antwerp, representative of the Department of Education, Arts and Science, made an important announcement in connection with the matter. He explained that although the report of the Interdepartmental Committee was not yet available, some of its recommendations had already been implemented by the Department. Two schools for blind Black children had been approved, namely the St Bernard School for the Blind<sup>24</sup> at Chuniespoort, and the School for the Blind at Klipspruit<sup>25</sup> in the Northern Transvaal. Both schools were under the auspices of church bodies.

Furthermore Dr Van Antwerp informed the meeting "that his Department had received two further applications from the N.G. Church for the establishment of schools for blind Black children, one at Umata in Transkei, and the other in the Orange Free State and that the Minister had these two applications under consideration".

On a proposal by Mr N. Cleverley that the Department be requested to establish a school for blind Blacks in Natal, Dr Van Antwerp replied that the N.G. Church had already approached the Department with the object of establishing a school there.

At a meeting of Council in October 1956 the name of the Committee for Bantu Blind was changed to the Committee for Non-European Blind. This step would allow the interests of the Coloured and Indian groups to be served by the Committee. Mr N. Cleverley of the Natal Bantu Blind Society was elected to the Chair.

In the report of the Committee which was submitted to the Executive Committee meeting held in March 1957, the most important matter which was raised by the Chairman (Mr Cleverley) was the question of the wrong siting of certain workshops for Non-European blind persons according to the Group Areas Act. The moving of the workshops



would be costly. Also, there would be problems finding suitable premises in other areas. Several deputations were appointed by Council to interview the Departments concerned in order to discuss the matter.

This question, which held the attention of the Societies and the Committee for Non-European Blind for a number of years, was finally resolved as a result of the accommodating spirit of the State departments concerned, and the assistance, financial and otherwise, of the National Council.

The Committee for Non-European Blind also concerned itself with the type of vocational training which was offered in the schools for blind Blacks, so as to bring it in line with the trades plied in sheltered workshops. This matter was of such importance that on the recommendation of the Committee, Council decided to convene a conference to discuss the matter. The Department of Native Affairs, the Department of Bantu Education, and the Department of Education, Arts and Science would be invited, as well as the three existing schools for blind Blacks and the Athlone School for the Blind.<sup>26</sup>

In the minutes and records of the Committee reference was often made to the so-called Shamba scheme, which was launched in Uganda by the "Uganda Foundation for the Blind", at the Salama Centre in Uganda. This was an agricultural project where blind people were occupied with farming on plots under supervision of a central organization. Full information was obtained and submitted to the Department of Native Affairs, with a view to the possible introduction of the project into our Black territories.

The Department itself also made investigations, and fully explained in a letter to the Committee why it considered that such a scheme could not be carried out successfully in South Africa. The letter concluded with a statement about the manner in which the Department intended approaching the question of employment for blind Blacks:

"The Department is not indifferent to the plight of blind Bantu persons but it intends to seek a solution of the problem in the development of home industries, sheltered employment projects, workshops and the like in Native areas and is investigating the possibilities in this direction. When the Department is in a position to commence the development of such schemes in Native areas it will welcome advice from your Council on the technical and professional aspects of the schemes."<sup>27</sup>

To follow this up, the Department of Bantu Administration and De-

velopment appointed an Interdepartmental Committee to investigate the vocational training in schools for blind Blacks. The National Council was invited to serve on the Committee, and the Department suggested that a Bantu Affairs Committee be appointed by the Council, with whom the Department could collaborate in all matters concerning blind Blacks. In the light of this the Committee for Non-European Blind recommended that a sub-committee for Bantu Affairs be appointed. The resolution of the Executive Committee reads as follows:<sup>28</sup>

“That the appointment of a Bantu Affairs Sub-Committee as an interim measure pending the appointment of a Standing Committee by the National Council to deal with Bantu Affairs only, as distinct from the affairs of other Non-European groups, be and is hereby confirmed and approved.”

For approximately a year the Bantu Affairs Sub-Committee existed alongside the Committee for Non-European Blind, and met separately. It had to report to the Committee for Non-European Blind. At the biennial meeting of Council held in October 1960, the Committee for Non-European Blind was abolished and replaced by the Committee for Bantu Affairs. Matters concerning the Coloured and Indian groups would henceforth be dealt with together with the other activities of Council. This was the position up to the year 1966 when the two Divisions were established, one for Coloured Affairs, and the other for Indian Affairs.

Here we close the history of the Committee for Native Affairs for the time being, as we have come to the end of the era being discussed (1949 to 1961). The Committee was destined to play a very important part in the development of services for blind Blacks. This will receive attention later on. The political changes which took place during the ensuing decade would, as a matter of course, have an influence on the approach of the National Council to its provision of services to the blind Black population. The methods which it applied and the problems which it experienced will receive the necessary attention in a following chapter.

- <sup>1</sup> Since the establishment of the committees the names of quite a number of them have been changed. The names by which they are known today are given here.
- <sup>2</sup> This committee was divided into two in 1976, one committee for rehabilitation and the other for placement.
- <sup>3</sup> This committee is regarded as an interim committee until a Division for Blind Blacks has been established.
- <sup>4</sup> The speech by Mr Kuschke has not been preserved. There was a brief summary in the minutes.
- <sup>5</sup> There is no mention of this in the minutes, possibly because it was considered of little consequence. Because there was no discussion, no resolution was adopted. The present writer was the Chairman of the sub-committee at the time, and presented the case.
- <sup>6</sup> The memorandum is dated 24 March 1954.
- <sup>7</sup> The post remained unsubsidised until 1978. In the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held in May 1978, it is reported that the post will henceforth be subsidised under certain conditions.
- <sup>8</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 3 March 1955.
- <sup>9</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 3 March 1955.
- <sup>10</sup> The present writer was present at the meeting of the Executive Committee and vividly remembers the strong differences of opinion which prevailed.
- <sup>11</sup> The word "employment" was sometimes alternated with "placement". In the same way the officer was sometimes referred to as the employment officer, and at other times as the placement officer.
- <sup>12</sup> Report of the Rehabilitation, Training and Placement Committee from April 1957 to October 1957. Annexure E to the minutes of the 73rd meeting of the Executive Committee held 29-31 October 1957.
- <sup>13</sup> Minutes of Council meeting held 16-18 October 1956.
- <sup>14</sup> Minutes of meeting of Division for Employment and Rehabilitation 30 January 1960, page 7.
- <sup>15</sup> Minutes of meeting of Division held 12 March 1960, page 3.
- <sup>16</sup> The Chairman of the Division made an announcement about this at a meeting of the Division held on 23 April 1960. Minutes of the meeting, page 3.
- <sup>17</sup> Minutes of the 10th meeting of the National Council, October 1950, page 10.
- <sup>18</sup> Minutes of the 11th Council meeting, page 18.
- <sup>19</sup> The first braille press was that of the Worcester School for the Blind.
- <sup>20</sup> Minutes Executive Committee of 19-21 March 1958.
- <sup>21</sup> Minutes of meeting of B.E.R. Committee held 1 August 1959, page 6.
- <sup>22</sup> The Siloe School for the Blind (Blacks) near Pietersburg started in 1951 with one pupil. Recommendations regarding the establishment of schools for Black children appear in the "Report of International Committee on Deviate Children - Volume 2, page 154 (published in 1952).
- <sup>23</sup> From the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee 1-2 October 1953, page 18.
- <sup>24</sup> Now the Siloe School for the Blind.
- <sup>25</sup> Now the Bosele School for the Blind.
- <sup>26</sup> No record of this conference is available. It is doubtful whether it was ever held.
- <sup>27</sup> Chairman's report for Committee for Non-European Blind attached to minutes of Executive Committee Meeting held March 1958.
- <sup>28</sup> Minutes of meeting of Executive Committee held October 1959, page 21.

## CHAPTER 8

### *A NEW ORGANIZATION PATTERN — II 1949 to 1961*

In the preceding chapter the establishment and activities of the special committees were dealt with, which showed how effectively this new organisational system could be utilised to further the aims of the National Council. This specialistic approach also made the provision of services to the blind of all population groups more purposeful. In this regard two more standing committees should receive attention, namely the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness and the Public Relations Committee. The latter held its first meeting in 1960, and therefore belongs to the next period. Consequently it will be dealt with in a later chapter. The Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness Committee deserves more comprehensive treatment on account of its importance and widespread activities.

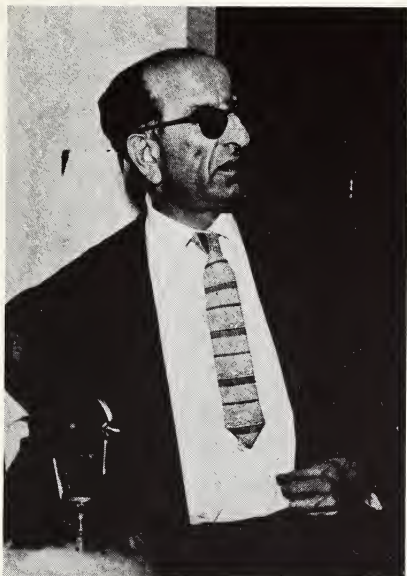
Although the most important aspect of this period was the establishment of the specialist committees, there were also various other matters which demanded the attention of Council. They included, inter alia, amendments to existing legislation, planning of national projects, assistance and advice to affiliated bodies, personnel matters, publicity, formulation of policy, and closer liaison with government departments.

Before proceeding with these matters, it is necessary first to recount what the position was concerning the officers of Council.

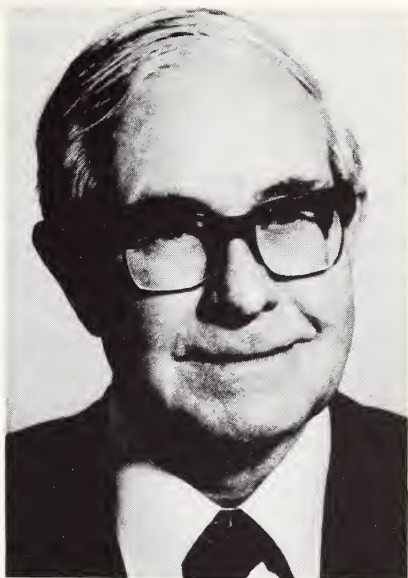
After his election as Chairman in 1948 as successor to Advocate Bowen, the Rev. A. W. Blaxall served for two terms only. In 1952 he was succeeded by Dr Louis van Schalkwijk.<sup>1</sup>

It was known at that time that Mr Blaxall had avoided the chairmanship as far back as the foundation of the Council. The reason for this was the fact that he was also the Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Deaf. The chairmanship of both National Councils simultaneously would have burdened him with too many commitments, the





Dr Walter Cohen, member of the Executive Committee and Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind from 1960 to 1962.



Mr F. A. Peters, Treasurer of Council since 1960.



Mr William Rowland, Director of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

more so because he was also involved with quite a number of other organizations, mostly connected with the Church. He thus remained firm in his decision in refusing renomination. Nevertheless it was a matter of grave concern for him to have the right person elected, since considerable developments, which would demand insight and good judgement on the part of the Chairman, were held in prospect.

At that time Dr Louis van Schalkwijk had already left the service of the State. During the last six years he was abroad most of the time as South Africa's representative on the Council for Social Services of the United Nations Organization (U.N.O.). For that reason he had no contact with the National Council for several years. After his retirement he settled in Cape Town.

Mr Blaxall was aware of Dr van Schalkwijk's circumstances and was convinced that he would be the right person to occupy the Chair. The manner of his election was told by Blaxall himself in an article on Dr Van Schalkwijk in *Imfama*, as follows:<sup>2</sup>

"During the 1952 meeting of the National Council, held at Grahamstown, when I found it necessary to be firm in refusing renomination as Chairman (I was at the time also Chairman of the Deaf Council), I immediately thought of Dr Van Schalkwijk for the honour. I knew he had just retired from public service so I suggested that if the Council acted quickly they might secure him. The election was postponed until the next day and I was asked to try and contact him, which I did by telegram and telephone. The following day I was able to announce his acceptance."

Thus we can report here that Louis Marthinus Albertus Nicholas van Schalkwijk was elected third Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind on 25 September 1952, a position which he occupied until his death in August 1961.

At the same meeting Mrs Mildred Marks was elected First Vice-Chairman and Mr A. B. W. Marlow Second Vice-Chairman. Mrs Marks was Chairman of the Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind and Mr Marlow the Principal of the Athlone School for the Blind.

Mr D. N. Murray was unanimously elected treasurer. He had occupied this office since 1946, when he succeeded Mr H. A. Tothill. Mr Murray was a member of the Council, representing the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind. He was head of Social Welfare Services of the Johannesburg City Council, and on account of his interest in this direction, he rendered valuable service to the Council in this field. He

served on various committees and sub-committees, and was also a member of several deputations to State departments. He served the Council as treasurer until 1960. After his departure Mr F. A. Peters was elected treasurer and he still occupies this position. It is thus remarkable that in the half century of the Council's existence, there were only three treasurers, namely Mr H. A. Tothill, M.P., Mr D. N. Murray and Mr F. A. Peters. A report concerning the latter will follow later.

At the same meeting of the National Council an amendment to the constitution<sup>3</sup> was adopted by which the Council was authorised to nominate a Patron, an Honorary President and two Honorary Vice-Presidents. Thus at the election of officers Miss J. E. Wood was elected Honorary President, and Miss M. Watson and Mr H. Matthews Honorary Vice-Presidents.

We proceed to report on the outstanding events in the history of the National Council during the period under review.

### **Rehabilitation Centre**

Certainly the most important project which the Council undertook during this period was the establishment of the Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre, which was opened on 15 March 1957. It was the fulfilment of a number of years of planning and preparation.

The rehabilitation and care of a person who had become blind later in life was a matter with which every society for the blind had to cope at some time or other. Some societies had made very effective attempts to combat the problem and were able to show good results. They were especially those who had a system of home-teaching. There were others who had psychological services at their disposal. It is thus erroneous to think that rehabilitation services only began with the establishment of the Centre. It was, however, felt that an organised scheme should be brought into being by which the necessary specialised attention could be given, especially to newly blinded persons.

Miss Enid Whitaker was the first to come forward with a concrete proposal. She thus deserves the honour of being the person who initiated the eventual establishment of a rehabilitation centre.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 25-26 March 1952 Miss Whitaker handed a copy of a report on her overseas visit to each member, in which she elaborated on the establishment of a rehabilitation centre for persons who had become blind in later life. After full discussion she was requested to draw up a detailed memorandum concerning the matter.





Miss Enid Whitaker after whom the Rehabilitation Centre is named.



Mrs Mildred Marks, founder member and for many years President of the Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind.



The original Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre, opened in Pretoria on 15 August 1956.



Miss Whitaker herself had become blind in later life. This had happened while she was on active service in the Middle East during the Second World War. She then went to England, where she attended an adjustment course at a rehabilitation centre for the blind. She therefore had first hand knowledge of such a centre and could appreciate the value of the services rendered.

At the next meeting of the Executive Committee Miss Whitaker submitted a comprehensive memorandum on the establishment of a rehabilitation centre. It was resolved to investigate the matter further. The Chairman of Council, Dr L. van Schalkwijk, concerned himself personally with the project.

Progress was not made according to expectations, however, since at first there was uncertainty as to whether the Council itself should establish the centre and finance it, or whether it should be entrusted to an affiliated society with generous financial aid from the Council. The latter point of view probably gained the day and consequently the second question arose, namely the place where the centre should be established. In this connection Bloemfontein, King William's Town and Worcester were mentioned. Finally it was considered that the Hillcoombe Holiday Home in East London would possibly be the most appropriate place, since in the first instance a building was available and secondly the Board of Management and staff of the institution had experience in caring for and supervision of blind people.

After much deliberation Dr Van Schalkwijk, as Chairman of the Committee which had been appointed to investigate the establishment of the centre, submitted a report to the Executive Committee at its meeting held on 1 and 2 October 1953.

From the report it appeared that Council had already approved the establishment of a rehabilitation centre in principle. The practicability of the project had still to be investigated.

After a long exposition of all that was understood by the concept of rehabilitation, the committee recommended that a beginning be made at Hillcoombe, depending on the attitude which the Board of Management of the holiday home would adopt towards such a proposition. The Committee stated its case as follows:

"The Sub-Committee felt that the project should initially be on a very modest scale . . . Such modest beginnings could conceivably be made at the Hillcoombe Holiday Home, but this suggestion should not exclude consideration of a scheme elsewhere. It is not

thought appropriate that Council itself should establish and conduct the centre, but rather that an affiliated society, in this case the East London Society, should undertake the task, with adequate subsidy from the Council."

It was then resolved to send a deputation (under leadership of Dr Van Schalkwijk) to East London to negotiate with the Society. The other members were Miss E. Whitaker, Mrs M. Marks and Mrs V. Fleming. The Organising Secretary of Council, Mr D. J. van Wyk, acted as secretary.

In the report of the deputation it was stated that the Board of Management of the East London Society had expressed their misgivings as to the advisability of housing the rehabilitation centre and the holiday home under the same roof. A separate unit would in any case have to be erected, which, according to municipal regulations, would have to be attached to the existing holiday home. Such a unit, which would serve as the centre, would then fall under an independent board of management. Furthermore, the Board of Management of the Society took a very firm stand with regard to the financing of the unit. It had to be the sole responsibility of the Council. In any case the Board of Management of the Society had to report to its members on the recommendations for a final decision.

The deputation in its report also gave an estimate of the costs. In the last paragraph it was recommended that Council should negotiate with the Worcester Institute in order to determine whether that body would be prepared to provide rehabilitation facilities at less expense to the Council than in the case of Hillcoombe. In view of this it was recommended that Worcester should be visited.

The visit took place on 27 March 1954. According to the report of the interview which Dr P. E. Biesenbach, as Superintendent of the Workshop and Homes for the Blind, had with the committee, the Worcester Institute had decided to extend its own rehabilitation facilities, with which it had already been occupied for several years. Dr Biesenbach provided information about what was envisaged.

The course, which would take three months, would include the following: psychological guidance and rehabilitation in the workshop or school as a form of occupational therapy, instruction in braille and typewriting, instruction in orientation and locomotion, medical and ophthalmic services, social rehabilitation, and religious guidance according to the Church denomination of the rehabilitees.

The course would be flexible and would continually be adapted in the light of experience gained.

The personnel would consist of a psychologist in charge of rehabilitation, a placement officer, a teacher of braille and typewriting and any other members of the school and institution staff who might find it possible to be of assistance.

Both English and Afrikaans-speaking candidates would be admitted from anywhere in South Africa, South West Africa and Rhodesia.

Committee members expressed their doubts as to whether the scheme could be a success without an officer who was an expert in the field of rehabilitation. Dr Biesenbach, however, was convinced that the staff members to whom the task was entrusted would be able to perform it adequately and successfully.

In view of the impending departure of Dr Van Schalkwijk overseas, where he would, *inter alia*, visit rehabilitation centres, it was resolved to leave the matter in abeyance. In the meantime contact would be kept up with the Worcester Institute.

In this connection the following is reported in the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of 27-28 September 1954:

"The Organising Secretary reported that he had been informed by the Worcester Institute for the Blind that it is progressing with its section for rehabilitation and that its first married rehabilitee had already been admitted into the married quarters. The Worcester Institute authorities had also extended a welcome to the Council's Chairman to discuss matters concerning rehabilitation in the light of his recent trip overseas."

In spite of the activities at Worcester, the Executive Committee of the National Council resolved to continue with the establishment of its own centre. The sub-committee, however, was divided regarding the use of Hillcoombe for both holiday home and rehabilitation centre. Besides this, it appeared that the East London Society was reluctant to undertake the project on behalf of the Council.

The Pretoria Society was approached in the meantime and stated its willingness to negotiate. A new sub-committee was appointed by the Executive Committee, who met the Management Committee of the Pretoria Society on 16 January 1956.

From this stage onwards rapid progress could be reported. An important aspect of the negotiations was that the Pretoria Society had agreed that their trained home-teacher could act as part-time rehabili-

tation officer. Thus the centre was ensured of professional services. The Council was also fortunate to procure a large dwelling house which was situated near to the Pretoria Society's office and workshop. This helped to ease the double duties of the home-teacher.

Initially it was intended to hire the house, but later it was decided to buy it. Certain alterations and renovations, however, were necessary. The person who was appointed part-time superintendent and rehabilitation officer was Miss E. J. Geyer, who had successfully completed the course for home-teachers at the Royal National Institute for the Blind.

After the preliminary arrangements for the purchase, renovation and equipment of the house and the appointment of personnel had been completed, the centre was ready to receive its first rehabilitees. The first person was admitted on 15 March 1957. The official opening took place on 30 October 1957 by the then Minister of Social Welfare, the Honourable J. J. Serfontein.

The work began on a small scale. At the beginning the personnel consisted of the superintendent, a matron and a domestic. A Management Committee was appointed by the Executive Committee comprising representatives of the Council on the one hand and the Pretoria Society on the other. This Committee also occupied itself with the general organization in matters where the superintendent needed assistance. Besides this, a house committee consisting of ladies from the Pretoria Society was appointed to help the superintendent with the domestic affairs.

As more rehabilitees were admitted to the centre, the duties of the rehabilitation officer inevitably increased. The result was that she found it impossible to occupy both positions, that of home-teacher of the Society and rehabilitation officer at the centre. It was then decided to make the post of superintendent/rehabilitation officer a full-time one. Miss Geyer was appointed to the post in a full-time capacity from 1 April 1958.

As the result of a resolution by the Executive Committee of Council, the rehabilitation centre was placed under the control of the Committee for Rehabilitation, Training and Employment in 1959. The original management committee of the centre was consequently abolished. The rehabilitation officer had to report to the Committee for Rehabilitation, Training and Employment on the general organization of the centre as well as the rehabilitees. The Chairman would then incorporate this information in his reports to the Committee and the Council.



At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 29-31 October 1957 it was resolved to name the rehabilitation centre after Miss Enid Whitaker, on whose initiative the centre had been established. It would thus be called the Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre.

The first report of the rehabilitation officer which formed part of the report of the Committee for Rehabilitation, Training and Employment (dated 12 August 1958) was submitted to the Executive Committee at its meeting of 13 and 14 October 1958. It contained a report on the progress which the rehabilitees had made as well as information about their placement. It is significant that right from the beginning the aim was not only "social rehabilitation", which was in vogue at the time, but also that genuine attempts be made to place these people in employment. In this connection the Chairman of the Committee (Mr J. H. van Niekerk) wrote as follows:

"Apart from our object in view to assist them to adapt themselves mentally and emotionally to blindness, we also provide some training for re-employment . . . We are authorised to proceed with our plans to transform the garage into a workshop for elementary training in woodwork."

The Chairman also mentioned that to date (i.e. from 15 March 1957 to 12 August 1958) fifteen persons (eight men and seven women) had been admitted to the centre.

He concluded his report as follows:

"The Centre functions as an ordinary home and our staff is much smaller than in similar circumstances overseas. Comparison is therefore difficult. We are confident, however, that we ultimately achieve the same object, namely the return of a man into himself as a contributor to society."

The last sentence can be considered to be the credo of the centre, from the first year of its existence up to the present.

It stands to reason that the financial aspect of the centre caused the Council concern, since it was soon realised that expansion would be necessary. The Council had already at an early stage made representations to the Department of Social Welfare for financial aid. It invoked clause 6 of the Blind Persons Act which makes provision for the payment of subsidies to: "hostels, homes, workshops and other places for the admission and training of persons who are completely or partially blind". Subsidies would also be paid in respect of the "emoluments of

persons who were employed by such a society or by the Council”.

It took four years, however, to obtain the subsidies. In the Chairman's report of the Division for Employment and Rehabilitation for the period April to October 1961, the following was stated:

“At least we can report that the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions has granted us a subsidy of R1 000 per year from 1 April 1961. There are several conditions attached to this subsidy, and negotiations will again be entered into with the Department in this connection.”

It appeared that the Department objected to the “training and re-training” which could possibly take place at the centre. It seemed that the Department inclined towards the system of social rehabilitation. After interviews with the Under-Secretary of the Department had taken place, these conditions for the granting of the subsidy were waived and in this connection we read the following in the minutes of the meeting of the Division for Employment and Rehabilitation of 24 February 1962:

“The Chairman explained that the Department of Social Welfare was prepared to waive entirely the wording on the certificate on the balance sheet to the effect that no vocational training or re-training was being given to any inmates of the Centre.”

It is almost inconceivable that rehabilitation can take place without holding out the prospect of possible employment. This would inevitably imply a certain degree of training or re-training. The school of thought in vogue in those days, however, was that rehabilitation should be social only and thus the Council, and particularly the Division for Rehabilitation and Employment, should be commended for their farsighted and modern outlook on matters.

When Miss Geyer resigned from the post of rehabilitation officer on 30 April 1962 after five years of service, the Council had difficulty in finding a qualified person to take her place. It has been mentioned before that there were only three trained home-teachers in the country at that time, and the other two were not available.

While efforts were being made to procure a suitable person, Miss C. Potgieter of the General Post Office staff acted as temporary rehabilitation officer for three months. At length somebody was appointed to the post in the person of Miss E. van der Wolk, who assumed duty on 3 September 1962. Before she could orientate herself satisfactorily for her new task, she had to undergo an emergency operation in February

1963, and she resigned on 19 March 1963. The post was immediately advertised and Miss J. Erwee was appointed. She assumed duty on 1 June 1963.

Although Miss Erwee had no home-teaching or social work qualifications, she had a very good insight into the problems of the blind. After having passed the matriculation examination at the Worcester School for the Blind, she completed the course in shorthand and typing, and after that started work as a dictaphone typist – first in the office of the principal of the Worcester School for the Blind and later in the civil service. Here the honour was accorded her to become the personal typist of the then Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, the Honourable T. Naudé.

Miss Erwee (later Mrs Bennett) was superintendent of the centre for a period of four-and-a-half years until the end of 1967. The detailed and informative reports which she regularly submitted regarding the rehabilitees were proof of the excellent manner in which she performed her duties. This was also the view of the Chairman of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment in his reports.

As early as 1962 there were stirrings amongst members for the building of a new rehabilitation centre. Apart from the fact that the terrain lacked space for the expansion which they had in mind, the building itself had become dilapidated. Year after year more money had to be spent on essential repairs. It was also realised that the management of a rehabilitation centre in an ordinary house, however large, could only be a temporary measure. The Council then started a building fund since it was realised that a considerable amount of money would be needed to erect a new rehabilitation centre. Also, it would be necessary to obtain a site which would have to comply with certain conditions. The question arose as to whether this would indeed be possible in Pretoria. There were members, including the Chairman of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment, Mr L. C. Jervis, who were of the opinion that the centre should be moved to Johannesburg. Not all members of the Committee were agreeable to this.

The existing site was considered ideal and it was thought perhaps by the more conservative members that the atmosphere of Pretoria would be more suitable for rehabilitation than Johannesburg. At a meeting of the Division for Rehabilitation and Employment held on 23 January 1965, a full discussion on the Centre took place about which the minutes record the following:

"The Chairman gave a brief description of the Rehabilitation Centre and its furnishings. He felt it was not possible under existing circumstances and with the material available to do rehabilitation work — the circumstances were not conducive to the rehabilitation of blind people. There was no possibility of extending or altering the centre to meet their needs and he felt a new centre should be provided."

In view of the above the Division resolved to appoint a sub-committee to investigate the matter and to make recommendations concerning possible future developments. The sub-committee presented its report to the meeting of the Executive Committee<sup>4</sup> held on 31 March 1965. The following extract from the report indicates the strong views of the sub-committee on the matter:

"We recommend that immediate steps be taken to build a Rehabilitation Centre which will provide the facilities required. . . . The greatest concentration of blind people is in Johannesburg and along the Reef and consideration should be given to the establishment of the Centre in this area."

The Executive Committee was in agreement with the recommendation of the sub-committee and resolved:

"That the principle for the establishment of a new rehabilitation centre is acceptable; such a centre must be situated in Johannesburg. . . . The Division for Rehabilitation and Employment is requested to investigate the project from all angles and to report back to the next meeting of the Executive Committee."

During the following six months the Division devoted a great deal of attention to the matter and in a memorandum<sup>5</sup> which Mr Jervis, the Chairman, submitted to the Executive Committee meeting, he reported on the progress which had been made.

The most important aspect of the project was certainly the fact that the Johannesburg Society for the Blind had consented to the establishment of the new rehabilitation centre on its terrain at Klipriviersberg (now Roseacre).

It would, however, be an independent unit, of which both the erection and its financial maintenance would be the sole responsibility of the National Council. As regards the costs connected with the building of the centre, there was a strong possibility that a subsidy would be obtained from the Department of Social Welfare so that the Council would not be obliged to bear the full cost.



The Chairman also indicated that negotiations had already taken place between the Division and the Johannesburg Society, and that it would be necessary to draw up an agreement between the Society and the Council at a later stage.

In his memorandum the Chairman described how certain practical measures could be applied to eliminate duplicating services set up by both the Society and the Centre. In this way it would be possible that specified sleeping and eating facilities which the centre might require could be provided by the Society's complex.

In later reports progress in respect of the project was regularly announced, such as discussions with the architects, drawing up of building plans, advertising for tenders and the erection of the building itself. Later it was announced that the centre would be completed in November 1967.

In January 1968 the first rehabilitees were admitted to the new Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre, Rewlatch Road, Roseacre, Johannesburg. As Mrs J. Bennett (the former Miss Erwee) had resigned in November 1967, a new rehabilitation officer had to be appointed from the beginning of the following year. The choice fell on Miss A. S. Steenkamp, who assumed duty in the new centre on 1 February 1968. She continued with the work for four years and resigned on 31 December 1971. On her departure the Chairman thanked her for the dedication with which she had performed her duties.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs C. M. Oosthuysen was appointed as Miss Steenkamp's successor. She was formerly a senior welfare officer of the Johannesburg Society. With her qualifications (a degree in welfare work) and experience, it was clear that she was a suitable candidate for the post. She assumed duty on 1 January 1972.

During Mrs Oosthuysen's term of office the staff was much enlarged. This was necessary in order to make the rehabilitation process as complete as possible, and to provide for the divergent needs of the various rehabilitees. Mrs Oosthuysen had come to realise the comprehensiveness of a programme for rehabilitation as a result of her overseas study tour in 1973, and had visited rehabilitation centres in various European countries.

Because the Rehabilitation Centre works with human material which is unique in many respects, it may perhaps be inadvisable to measure its success according to the number of rehabilitees who completed the course during a given period. We know that there are im-

ponderable factors which are more important than mere statistics. Yet the following figures will give an indication of the scope of the work, or rather of the need which existed for a programme of rehabilitation for blind persons in our country.

At first the admissions in Pretoria were more or less two to four at a time, and the duration of the course was approximately six to eight weeks per rehabilitee. The size of the building determined the intake. Another factor was that both sexes had also to be accommodated. When the move to Johannesburg took place more accommodation was available, and with a larger staff more persons could be admitted. The programme for each rehabilitee could also be expanded, with the result that the period for rehabilitation could be lengthened to approximately twelve weeks. In this connection the following was taken from the report of the Chairman of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Placement<sup>6</sup> which appeared in the 23rd biennial report of Council (1974-1976):

“In the period 1 January 1974 to 31 December 1974 a total of 35 persons completed the full rehabilitation course. Extended courses were given to 18 persons, whereas 16 persons received temporary social assistance. After-care services were rendered to 40 past rehabilitees.”

The figures for the year 1975 were approximately the same as for 1974. To cope with the work, the necessary staff must be available. Concerning this the report states the following:

“As far as the staff position is concerned, we are grateful to report that our staff now consists of a senior rehabilitation officer, an assistant rehabilitation officer, a mobility instructress, a typing instructress, a braille instructress and a full-time typist. There are also posts for a handicraft and telephone instructress. It is hoped that the latter two posts will shortly be filled. In the meantime we are gratefully using the services of the telephony training facilities of the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind.”

The courses which the centre offers are stated in a brochure which was published by the Council in 1976. They are classified under the following headings:

- Orientation and Mobility
- Communication practices (braille and typing)
- Telephony
- Activities of daily living.

Besides this, a complete programme in social and psychological guidance is given with a view to re-entry into normal life. Attention is also given to employment.

Since the beginning of 1977, when Mr V. H. MacFarlane assumed office (Mrs Oosthuysen had resigned at the end of 1976), instruction in the use of the optacon is also given. Mr MacFarlane, who completed a course in this, is capable of giving the instruction. The optacon is an electronically controlled apparatus which makes it possible for a blind person to read ordinary print. It is a very useful and, in some cases, essential instrument, especially for students, teachers and professional persons.

In conclusion it should be stated that there is at present a long waiting list of persons who have applied for admission. The list is approximately as long as that of the total admissions for one year. This matter keeps the Committee for Rehabilitation continually occupied, and soon the physical enlargement of the centre will have to be considered. This is at present receiving attention.

### **The Cape Town Regional Office**

The creation of a post of fund-raiser for the Cape Peninsula inevitably led to the establishment of the Cape Regional Office. The resolution was taken by the Executive Committee at a meeting held on 10 November 1948, and was confirmed by Council. It was further decided that the venture would be in the nature of an experiment for twelve months, and that Miss A. F. Gillies would be appointed to the post.

Miss Gillies had already proved her worth long before, especially during the annual "Our Blind Day" fund-raising. As a result of the very successful efforts of the Cape Town Committee, of which Miss Gillies was a member, the annual Cape Town collection and fund-raising far exceeded those of the other large centres.

Miss Gillies assumed duty on 1 February 1949 on a temporary basis for one year, but was permanently appointed at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 6 and 7 October of that same year. The Chairman remarked on the excellent results she had obtained with fund-raising during the year.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held in March 1950 Miss Gillies gave an account of her work. She stated, among other things, that on account of insufficient office assistance, her efforts were seriously hampered. It was then resolved that the local committee in

Cape Town be authorised to make provision for the appointment of a paid assistant when it should be necessary. This was especially the case when Miss Gillies was out of town, and the office needed somebody to be in charge.

The success which was achieved in the Cape Peninsula is reflected in the statements on collections throughout the country for the period 1 January to 30 September 1950 (subjoined to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of 17 October 1950). The following are the amounts to the nearest hundred pounds:

Cape Peninsula £6 000 (R12 000)

Rest of Cape Province £5 100 (R10 200)

Rest of the country £4 200 (R8 400)

This success was repeated in 1951.

To its dismay, however, the Executive Committee was informed by Miss Gillies at its meeting of March 1952 that she would be leaving Cape Town and was thus obliged to resign. A Committee of the Cape Town members was instructed to consult with Miss Gillies as to how measures could be taken to keep the office in Cape Town functioning. For the first time also the possible appointment of a public relations officer was discussed. It was then resolved to appoint a sub-committee to go into the question of the appointment of a public relations officer, and also to deliberate on a possible incumbent.

Great relief was felt, however, when Miss Gillies withdrew her resignation at the next meeting, but she applied for leave without remuneration for the two months January and February. This was readily granted. The local committee would make arrangements to keep the office going as efficiently as possible.

Probably encouraged by the success of the Cape Town office, the question was raised<sup>7</sup> as to whether this system of fund-raising could be extended to other parts of the country. It was then resolved to create a second similar post, the incumbent to be stationed partly in Pretoria and partly in Johannesburg.

In contrast with the position in Cape Town, the Council did not meet with the same success with its fund-raising in the north. This was chiefly due to the fact that the persons who had been appointed resigned shortly after they had assumed office.

In spite of what appeared to be a setback, the Council and the various northern societies continued with their fund-raising efforts, and gained good results. A Joint Fund Committee was established to co-



ordinate the fund-raising of the various organisations on the Witwatersrand. A collective effort by the Council and the Johannesburg Society was undertaken by which one third of the collected money would go to the Council and two thirds to the Society. The personnel of head office themselves pulled their weight and organised countrywide collections during "Our Blind Week". These untiring efforts bore good fruit and the Council procured the necessary funds to enable it to continue with its work.

It was the Council's aim, however, apart from fund-raising, to develop a system by which the Council and its work, as well as the image of the blind, would be brought to the attention of the public. For this a wide publicity campaign was necessary. To launch such a project successfully it was imperative that a capable, well-informed and enthusiastic person should be appointed as public relations officer. Such a person was, however, hard to find.

At its wits' end, the Council resolved to appoint Mr S. K. Wentworth as acting public relations officer in addition to his work as Director of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. A revival in the field of publicity took place as a result of the enthusiasm with which Mr Wentworth undertook every task entrusted to him. This can be seen in the first report which he submitted to the Executive Committee. In it he reported on quite a number of events, functions and exhibitions which had taken place during the week preceding "Our Blind Day". He also made several recommendations as to how the question of publicity should be dealt with.

We find, however, that Mr Wentworth was back at the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness in a full-time capacity from the beginning of 1958. The question of public relations work and fund-raising was referred back to the Executive Committee by the Council with full powers to act according to their discretion.

Thus it happened that the Executive Committee appointed Mr J. Ellis as Public Relations Officer with headquarters in Cape Town at its meeting of 17 to 19 March 1959. Mr Ellis was a blinded ex-soldier who had been in the service of the St Dunstan's Association. A sub-committee for fund-raising was also appointed, consisting of Dr L. van Schalkwijk, Mr A. B. W. Marlow, Mr G. S. Schermbrucker, with Mr H. Matthews in an advisory capacity, to make arrangements for acquiring office equipment etc., and to assist Mr Ellis at the start of his new work. In connection with the division of work between Miss Gillies and Mr

Ellis, it was resolved that it should be a mutual arrangement between themselves. This was possible since very good co-operation existed between them. Miss Gillies would confine herself to the Cape Peninsula, while Mr Ellis's activities would range throughout the country.

At the biennial meeting of the Council held in October 1960, Mr G. S. Schermbrucker, Chairman of the sub-committee (now named the Public Relations Sub-Committee) reported on the work of the Public Relations Officer. Mr Ellis was very active and good results were forthcoming. When the report was discussed objections were raised by the Johannesburg Society in connection with the relation between the Public Relations Officer and the Joint Fund for the Blind. Overlapping was taking place and the Public Relations Officer was entering the field of the Joint Fund. It was decided that discussions should take place between the Committee of the Joint Fund and the Public Relations Sub-Committee to settle the matter.

At the meeting it was resolved that the Public Relations Sub-Committee be transformed into a standing committee, namely the Public Relations Committee.

The following persons were elected as members of the Public Relations Committee for the following biennial term, 1960-1962:

Messrs G. S. Schermbrucker, A. McKellar White, T. Cutten, L. Olivier and L. Levey.

As the activities of the Committee and those of the Public Relations Officer fall within the range of the following period of the Council's history, from 1961, the matter will receive attention in a later chapter.

When reading the reports of the Cape Town office one is struck by the fact that other work was also done besides fund-raising. Thus we find that one of the extra activities of the office was the recruiting of donors of corneas which could be used for transplants. Miss Gillies stayed in close touch with ophthalmologists and hospitals and regularly supplied statistics about the number of corneal transplants which had been done.

One is also impressed by the large number of voluntary helpers which Miss Gillies could enlist for the routine work in the office, such as addressing envelopes and preparing circulars and pamphlets for dispatch. Then also, at the end of every report of the Cape Town office, a special word of thanks was expressed to a well-known Cape firm which did the auditing free of charge.

A big task undertaken by the Cape Town office, which extended

over quite a number of years, was the publication and distribution of a richly illustrated book about South Africa, written and compiled by Mr C. S. Stokes and Miss C. Gillies. Its title was *Golden Heritage*, and it was the third book which Mr Stokes had written about South Africa. The other two are *Sanctuary* and *Joyful Errand*. The books were very well received by the public as well as the press. As a result of the publication of *Golden Heritage* a legacy of £2000 (R4 000) was received from a person from Knysna. The total profit from the sale of the book amounted to R61 000. In every respect, thus, it was a praiseworthy effort and financially a great success. To conclude, the results of some of the outstanding efforts of that era were the following:<sup>8</sup>

Stickers sold during the Van Riebeeck festival (1952)	: R5 110
Stamps sold during the Silver Jubilee (1954)	: R16 954
<i>Joyful Errand</i> — sales	: R61 176
<i>Golden Heritage</i> — sales	: R21 922

The Cape Town Office with Miss Gillies at the helm had thus made a valuable contribution to the financial stability of the Council.

### A mouthpiece of its own

It is of the greatest importance that the work of any organization be made known by means of its own journal or mouthpiece. The Executive Committee realised this and the matter was raised for the first time at a meeting held on 15 October 1956 when the following resolution was passed:

“That it be a recommendation to the National Council that a monthly newsletter be issued and that consideration be given to issuing a quarterly or half-yearly magazine in connection with blind welfare services in South Africa and overseas.”

The minutes of the meeting of the Council which followed directly after the abovementioned meeting make no mention of the recommendation, but it must have been approved, for at the meeting of the Executive Committee which followed afterwards (20 October 1956), an editorial committee was appointed. The members were Dr L. van Schalkwijk and Messrs W. Cohen and V. H. Vaughan. Mr Cohen was appointed editor.

The first issue of the Newsletter, as it was called, appeared in November 1956, and it has been issued since then without interruption until today, although the name has been changed. The wish which the

editor expressed in the last paragraph of his first report to the Executive Committee, dated 14 September 1959, has indeed become a reality:

"In conclusion, your editor . . . regards it as a privilege to undertake this honorary task, and trusts that the Executive will allow him to continue in office for a further period, preferably an indefinite period."

Initially the Newsletter was duplicated on ordinary folio size paper. All news items and articles appeared in both languages, so that the Newsletter was a completely bilingual publication. The other members of the editorial committee assisted with the translation. Sometimes some of the office staff were called in to help. Later on the Newsletter appeared in a smaller format, but still duplicated, with a more attractive cover.

The duplicating, arranging, stapling, wrapping, franking and dispatching of the Newsletter was done by the staff of the office. Considering that, according to the editor's report, the monthly distribution figure was 1 260 at that time (1959), one can well imagine what an immense task it was. Fortunately they were able to obtain volunteers to assist them with the work.

The editor mentioned in later reports that both the press and the South African Broadcasting Corporation often took over news-items from the Newsletter. It also happened that telephone requests were received for more information about specific news items.

The Newsletter remained a duplicated publication until September 1961, when it was decided that it would appear in print. A number of changes then took place, amongst which was the change of name. *Imfama* was decided upon, which is the Xhosa word for a blind person. It was now also possible to illustrate the publication with photographic material.

In the first issue of *Imfama* (September 1961)<sup>9</sup> messages from Miss J. E. Wood, Honorary President of the National Council, and Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, Chairman, appeared in English and Afrikaans respectively. The practice to publish all subject matter in both languages was abolished. A good balance between the two languages was kept, however.

Miss Wood concluded her message as follows:

"The Editor of The Newsletter has done such wonderful work and I wish him all success in this new venture. It has been a great



help to us in the Library to get news of our readers and of other societies and we are very grateful for this help."

Dr Van Schalkwijk mentioned the fact "that a magazine is the only efficient means by which knowledge of the work can be spread and the solidarity of the participating societies can be furthered". He writes further that, simultaneously with the appearance of the publication in its new form, steps were also being taken to have it printed for the first time in braille.

A photograph of the office bearers of that time appeared on the first page of the first issue of *Imfama*. They were Dr L. van Schalkwijk (Chairman), Mr Walter Cohen (First Vice-President), Mr A. B. W. Marlow (Second Vice-President), Mr S. K. Wentworth (General Secretary) and Mr C. W. Kops (committee member).

It is quite interesting to page through the first few editions, and thus be able to recall a specific part of the Council's history, and that of its affiliated societies. This is reflected in the articles, reports, records and news-items which appear in it. To supplement these an editorial appeared each month, alternately in English and Afrikaans, in which matters concerning the activities of the Council were dealt with. It was written under the heading: In the opinion of your Editor.

A few years later *Imfama* increased in size and its cover became more attractive. The photographs were clear and the layout more professional. The publication was indeed a credit to the National Council.

Unfortunately, on account of the rising cost of paper and printing, the Council was obliged to curtail the number of issues and as from 1974 it appeared every alternate month, thus six times per year.

Today *Imfama* is an indispensable part of the activities, organization and development of the National Council and its affiliated and associated bodies. Apart from the publicity value which it has for the Council by making its activities known, it also serves a specific purpose by keeping a record of the development of services to the blind and the achievements of the blind themselves. As such it is of inestimable value to the future research worker.

In 1962 the Council resolved to publish a monthly magazine in braille, specifically for blind Black readers in their own languages. Initially only one magazine was published, with the title of *Difofu*, with articles in Zulu/Xhosa braille and Sepedi/Sotho braille in alternate issues. At the request of the readers it was decided to cease the publication of *Difofu* and to publish two separate periodicals, namely *Sedi-*

## *SILVER JUBILEE*

### *1929-1954*



Members of the Executive Committee at the time of the Silver Jubilee of the S.A. National Council of the Blind in 1954. From left: R. F. Good (Dept. of Finance), V. H. Vaughan, Dr K. Winterton (Health), J. H. van Niekerk, Rev. A. W. Blaxall, K. M. Pillay, W. Cohen, Mrs V. Fleming, Miss E. Whitaker, D. N. Murray (Treasurer), Dr L. van Schalkwijk (Chairman), D. J. van Wyk (Organizing Secretary), Mrs V. H. Pond (Committee Clerk), Miss A. F. Gillies (Cape Town Office), S. K. Wentworth (Bureau Director), Mrs M. Marks, Miss A. M. Rogers, Mrs O. Hopwood, Mr T. F. Coertze (Native Affairs), A. H. Cluver, A. B. W. Marlow (Vice-Chairman), H. Matthews (Vice-President).

beng in Sepedi/Sotho and Ilanga Lethu in Zulu/Xhosa. Dr Cohen is the editor of both.

### **Silver Jubilee**

In 1954 the Council commemorated the 25th anniversary of its founding with the sale of jubilee stamps and a special edition of the twelfth biennial report. In the report the Chairman, Dr L. van Schalkwijk, paid a fitting tribute to the pioneers, such as Adv. R. W. Bowen, Rev. A. W. Blaxall and Miss J. E. Wood. After that he outlined what he considered to be the chief characteristics of what can be called a complete welfare service for the blind.

After that a description followed of the services rendered by the National Council and its affiliated societies, with a summary of what was held in prospect. The Chairman also stated that many gaps still existed, and in this connection he wrote as follows:

“Some of these gaps are (to mention the most important) insufficient sheltered employment facilities for Non-Europeans, home teaching or home workers’ schemes which are only in their initial stage, and placement in the ordinary competitive labour market. There is also need for extending personal welfare services to the blind, which would include home visiting, assistance in the home and the provision of recreational, cultural and spiritual amenities.”

In the report statistics were given with regard to the number of blind persons who received pensions and the amount paid out annually. On 31 March 1954, 21 496 persons of all races were receiving pensions, and the amount for the financial year 1953/1954 was estimated at £420 300 (R840 600). More statistics followed such as the distribution of blind persons among the four different race groups and in the four provinces of the then Union of South Africa.

Thereafter data were supplied about the “establishment and chronological development of the National Council and each of the blind welfare societies and institutions in the Union of South Africa”.

It starts with the foundation of the Worcester Institute for the Blind in 1881 and the most important events, with dates, of its historical development. After that followed the establishment in 1918 of the Society for the Blind in Durban. Next came the S.A. Library for the Blind in Grahamstown in 1919. After this reference is made to the establishment of the first group of societies, and the National Council itself

with a brief summary of its development and the various forms of services to the blind.

In a separate statistical table figures were supplied in respect of the 26 affiliated societies concerning matters such as the year of establishment, number of blind persons on register, in sheltered workshops, in hostels and homes, and so forth. An interesting figure was the number of trained social workers in the service of the Council and the various societies. It was stated that the Council itself had two in its employ and the total for the Societies was ten (six Whites and four Blacks).

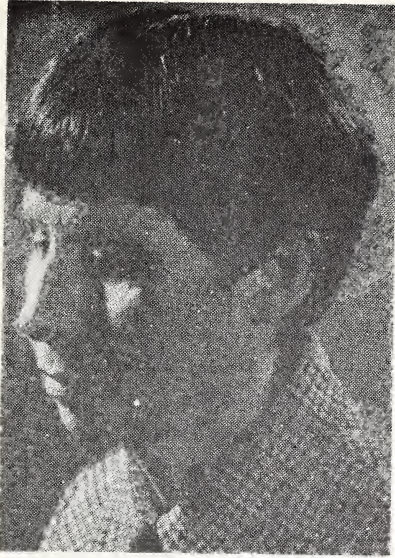
On the cover of the Jubilee Report is a reproduction of the famous painting by G. F. Watts, R.A., with the title: Hope. It portrays a blind-folded woman sitting on the world, and playing on a harp with a single string. This illustration also appeared on the jubilee stamps which were sold in aid of the National Council during the year 1954. The latter venture was launched from the Cape Town office. The various affiliated societies were involved with the selling of the stamps, and their co-operation was excellent. As can be imagined, it was a very big undertaking, considering that five million stamps had been printed for distribution. The proceeds were considerable and well worth the trouble. Apart from the financial benefits, the sale of the stamps brought the activities of the Council to the attention of the public. Large placards which were used as advertisements for the sale of the stamps also helped with this.

### Visit of Helen Keller

An outstanding event which took place during the period under discussion was the visit of Dr Helen Keller, the famous deaf-blind American woman, to South Africa. The invitation to visit our country came from Rev. A. W. Blaxall on behalf of the S.A. National Council for the Blind and the S.A. National Council for the Deaf. After her departure Mr Blaxall published a booklet with the title: *Helen Keller under the Southern Cross*, which was a description of this historic visit. The first part of it, which deals chiefly with the trends of thought and philosophies of Helen Keller, was compiled by Mr Blaxall, and the second part, approximately 18 pages, was written by herself. In this she gives some impressions of her visit.

Dr Helen Keller arrived in Cape Town by sea on 15 March 1951, accompanied by her friend and companion, Miss Polly Thompson, and Mr Alfred Allen of the American Foundation for the Blind, New York.





Miss C. E. Aucamp, President of the S.A.B.W.O.

Miss A. F. Gillies, for years organiser of the Cape Town office and member of the Board of the Athlone School for the Blind.



Visit of Helen Keller to the Athlone School for the Blind on 21 March 1951. Mr H. Russell, Chairman of School Committee, Mr A. B. W. Marlow, Principal, Miss H. Currey, member of School Committee, Helen Keller, Polly Thompson.

Their sojourn in South Africa lasted two months and a week. The party departed for America on 22 May 1951.

Those centres where active organizations or institutions for the blind and deaf existed were visited, such as Cape Town, Worcester, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, East London, King William's Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Kimberley; and besides the above, also Pietermaritzburg, Uitenhage, Alice (Lovedale), Potchefstroom and Salisbury. Apart from visits to institutions for the blind and deaf, public meetings were held at most places.

Scrutinising her itinerary, one is astonished that a woman of seventy, so seriously handicapped, could undertake such a strenuous tour. She had numerous appointments for interviews, functions, meetings and visits to schools and institutions. The public flocked to hear her speak.

Some of the outstanding functions which were arranged in her honour were a civic dinner in the Cape Town City Hall, a reception at the American Embassy, a function by the Administrator of the Cape Province, a function by the University of the Witwatersrand, on which occasion she received an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, tea with the Prime Minister and Mrs Malan, also with the Governor-General and Mrs Jansen, and a garden party by the Mayor of Cape Town.

In connection with her visit to Groote Schuur she wrote: "It was delightful with South African hospitality and the gracious privacy in which our hosts entertained us. . . . I touched the ridged-back lion-dog that followed us wherever we moved. Dr Malan put into my hand some lovely roses that were part of the garden's colourful glory, and cordially wished me the fulfilment of all my desires for the well-being of the handicapped of South Africa."

With regard to her visit to Worcester her remarks were: "The swift, generous response of the Worcester people is among the dearest memories of my South African tour". She also had kind words for the S.A. Library for the Blind in Grahamstown and for Miss Josie Wood, its head: "Lovingly, I cherish her gentle face, her warm handclasp, quiet ways in memory."

In the section of the book written by Mr Blaxall he gave his impressions of Helen Keller as gleaned from her speeches and lectures. Amongst all her moving utterances Mr Blaxall quotes the following one especially:

"I believe that through these dark and silent years God has been



using my life for a purpose I do not know, but one day I shall understand, and then I will be satisfied."

The visit to South Africa by Helen Keller brought the cause of the blind and the deaf vividly to the attention of the public. The press gave ample coverage to the visit, and the newsreels continually showed facets of her travels in their programmes. Miss A. F. Gillies, Regional Organiser of the National Council in Cape Town, who was chiefly responsible for the organization there, wrote in a report to Council:

"The outstanding feature in 1951 was the visit of Helen Keller and Polly Thompson . . . Their most memorable visit created considerable interest in the welfare of the blind and deaf and had a most rewarding influence on the work of affiliated societies and the Council in South Africa."

Mr Blaxall must be commended for this gigantic undertaking, which he carried out so successfully. Although he had the co-operation of organizations for the deaf and blind throughout the entire country as well as that of many individuals, the responsibility of making all the arrangements run smoothly rested on his shoulders. The tour not only benefited the two National Councils, but also furthered the cause of the blind throughout the country.

### **Death of Chairman and Secretary**

We have indicated at the beginning of the chapter that the year 1961 can be considered as the conclusion of an era on account of the death of Dr Louis van Schalkwijk on 29 August of that year. In the same year, indeed only ten days previously, on 19 August, Mr D. J. van Wyk, Organising Secretary of the Council, died. A short summary of the life and work of Mr Van Wyk now follows, and after that an account of the versatile life led by Dr Van Schalkwijk and the role he played as Chairman of Council and in the interests of the blind.

### **Mr D. J. van Wyk**

Daniel Jacobus van Wyk (born 1898) joined the staff of the Council as its Organising Secretary in 1943. He had previously been Town Clerk of Clocolan, O.F.S., and had done military service during 1942.

He proved to be a dutiful and loyal official of the Council. On various occasions the different chairmen had remarked on these qualities. Although one cannot regard him as having been a person with vision or with outstanding resourcefulness, it can well be said that he carried out the tasks and commissions with which he had been entrusted,

either by the Executive Committee or by the affiliated societies, with conscientious zeal. His meticulous handling of money matters was also much appreciated.

He represented the Council at various conferences and attended an international seminar on vocational rehabilitation for the blind at Manor House, Torquay, England, in 1956 as the representative of the National Council. Manor House is one of the rehabilitation centres of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, London. After that he visited institutions in Holland, Belgium, Scotland and England and also had interviews with various persons in the field of rehabilitation and employment both in sheltered workshops and in open labour. The report of his visit, which lasted from 23 March to 31 May 1956, was comprehensive and informative. He concentrated chiefly on the organization of rehabilitation centres, since the Council was occupied with the establishment of its own rehabilitation centre at that time.

For approximately three years before his retirement in June 1961 his health left much to be desired. When he was unable to attend the biennial meeting of the Council at Port Elizabeth on October 1958 the Acting Chairman of Council, Mr Walter Cohen, sent him a letter of appreciation on behalf of the Council and expressed the hope that his health would improve. It did not, however, but in spite of impaired health he continued with his work. From June 1960 until his retirement in June 1961 he had to take sick leave. He passed away on 19 August 1961.

#### **Dr L. M. A. N. van Schalkwijk**

In the field of education, rehabilitation and the provision of welfare services to handicapped persons, Louis van Schalkwijk must certainly be regarded as one of the most knowledgeable persons of his time. This was also acknowledged internationally. The high esteem in which he was held overseas is shown by the many letters of appreciation for his services which were received after his death from prominent persons in the field.

There were mainly two reasons why the National Council should consider itself fortunate in having obtained the valued services of Dr Louis van Schalkwijk as Chairman. The first was the fact that he had an intimate knowledge of the civil service at the highest level and could negotiate directly with the most senior officials, and even Ministers. The second was the fact that he had then already retired and was able to devote all his time to the Council. He took upon himself a consider-



able amount of work of a purely administrative nature. In fact it can be said that, although in an honorary capacity, he was actually in the full-time employ of the Council. After his death the Acting Organising Secretary, Mr S. K. Wentworth, wrote the following to a friend: "All of us now must carry some additional burden and I pray that we shall be equal to it."

Except for a short time at the beginning of his career when he was a teacher in an ordinary school, he devoted his whole life to the handicapped. It became such a part of him that on one occasion he said: "People seemed to interest me only if they suffered from some disability or other."<sup>10</sup>

Louis Marthinus Albertus Nicholas van Schalkwijk was born in Mossel Bay in the year 1888. After his university education in Cape Town he entered the teaching profession and taught at Simonstown and Carnarvon. At Simonstown he counted Dr H. J. Hugo, at one time Director of Hospital Services in the Transvaal, among his pupils, and at Carnarvon he taught Dr Biesenbach, former Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind. According to the latter he was appointed as an assistant teacher at the Carnarvon High School in January 1914, and later in the same year as Principal. His versatility is evident from the fact that he was capable of teaching any subject required in a high school. He was then only 26 years of age.

Later he went to Amsterdam to further his studies in philosophy, psychology and education. He obtained a doctor's degree with a thesis on the *Social Education of John Dewey and his Philosophical Basis*.

He visited England, Germany and Austria to study institutional methods with regard to the education and rehabilitation of the handicapped such as the deaf, the blind, cripples, epileptics, sub-normals, the severely retarded, psychopaths and juvenile delinquents. He not only acted as an observer but at times also worked in the institutions without remuneration. This served as a preparation for his long and distinguished career in all these fields in South Africa.

After his return he was appointed chief inspector of schools in the Union Department of Education. His duties chiefly concerned the education of the handicapped, the maladjusted, and juvenile delinquents in reformatories. His studies had prepared him eminently for the task. The duties of the inspectors working under him did not include the inspection of schools for the blind and the deaf. He undertook this responsibility himself. A visit by Dr Van Schalkwijk to any

school was always an outstanding event. He usually made use of the opportunity to address the staff and the pupils. Many ex-pupils still remember the interesting anecdotes he told of his experiences abroad. His inspections were very thorough, and his reports on individual teachers fair and complete. He was meticulous in the use of language and was perfectly bilingual. He was especially fond of inserting Latin expressions here and there in his reports, memoranda and letters. In connection with his inspectorship Dr P. E. Biesenbach wrote in Imfana after his death: "I shall never forget how he always strove to obtain as much as possible from the Department for the school. He acted as the intercessor for the school at the Department, not as the protector of the Department. The school owes the appointment of its first Vice-Principal and that of its adequate staff, the establishment of the braille printing press and other facilities of the thirties, to him."

He was responsible for an extremely important change of policy in connection with special education of a different character. This was the transfer of the reformatories from the control of the Department of Prisons to the Department of Union Education. In this he proved himself to be a true educationist. It was his conviction that the rehabilitation of young violators of the law should take place within the sphere of education. Legislation was necessary for this step, and it was mostly through his intervention that the Act in question was passed by Parliament in 1935.

Another piece of legislation with which he was intimately involved was the Vocational and Special Education Act of 1928 (Act No. 21 of 1928), which formed the original cornerstone for all subsequent legislation concerning special education in South Africa. From 1 April 1925 the subsidisation of special schools was transferred from the provincial administrations to the Union Education Department. After that several other matters in connection with financing, provision of staff, conditions of appointment of personnel, grants to pupils, criteria for admission, duties and responsibilities of school management boards, etc. had to receive attention. This had to be included in the Act and the regulations, for which Dr Van Schalkwijk was largely responsible.

In October 1937 the Department of Social Welfare was established and Dr Van Schalkwijk was transferred from Union Education to the post of Superintendent of Welfare and Probation Services in the new Department. In this capacity he was responsible for the rehabilitation of deviate adults, which included such categories as alcoholics, work-

shy persons, criminals and those with psychological deviations such as psychopaths. During his period of service in the Department of Social Welfare he also made an important contribution to the drafting of the Children's Act.

In 1941, during the Second World War, he was transferred to the Department of Defence in the capacity of Director of Readjustment Services for Disabled Soldiers. He was in charge of personnel appointed in the larger centres to serve the interests of soldiers with physical disabilities, often also in hospitals.

Later Dr Van Schalkwijk was transferred to the Department for Demobilisation which was chiefly concerned with the adjustment of returned soldiers. Those who suffered from some injury or other, physical or mental, were placed in sheltered workshops, of which nineteen had been established. Today quite a number of these institutions, to which civilian disabled persons are now admitted, still exist.

After the end of the Second World War, in 1946, he was appointed permanent representative of the Union of South Africa on the Social and Economic Council of the United Nations Organization in New York. He served on this body for six years until his retirement in 1952. During the last year of his membership he acted as its chairman.

He was appointed to various government committees and his advice was always in demand on account of his wide knowledge and experience. His chairmanship of the Committee for the Provision of Education for the Partially Sighted, of which a report appeared in 1958, was of importance in so far that the education of partially sighted children was finally placed under the Union Education Department. Before that uncertainty had existed as to whether it should fall under the provincial education departments or under the central government. The result was that the first school for partially sighted children, namely the Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted, was established in Pretoria in 1963.

Mention has often been made in previous chapters of the important role played by Dr Van Schalkwijk in the history of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, as well as in its establishment. This was also the case with the National Council for the Deaf. The first meeting which led to its foundation was also in 1928 and Dr Van Schalkwijk (along with Mr Blaxall) was actively involved in it. He also served on the Executive Committee of the National Council for the Deaf for several years.



In the course of his official duties, but specifically on account of his knowledge, he was involved with practically all the National Councils, and served on the Executive Committees of most. This applied *inter alia* to Child Welfare (of which he was the Vice-Chairman at one time), Mental Health, the Aged (of which he was the co-founder and at one time secretary). Everywhere he made his influence felt and became involved in their activities.

Dr Van Schalkwijk often travelled overseas, where he had many contacts as a result of his duties at U.N.O. His travels were always on behalf of the handicapped, no matter to what category they belonged. On one occasion he drew up a lengthy report on rehabilitation in England at the time when the National Council was devising plans for a similar centre in South Africa. In another report on the training of physiotherapists he revealed that he had attended classes at the London School of Physiotherapy of the R.N.I.B. for a full day. He also played an important role in the World Council for the Blind. He represented the National Council for the Blind at the initial conferences and, as could be expected, was very soon elected a member of the Executive Committee of that body. He was also the Chairman of one of the World Council's most important committees, namely that which concerned itself with the rural blind. He was also invited to become a member of the Executive Committee of I.C.E.B.Y. (International Council for the Education of Blind Youth) when it was first established.

Dr Louis van Schalkwijk was a well-read man, and a good conversationalist on a wide variety of subjects. He was especially interested in the behaviour patterns of psychopaths.

In one of his letters he remarked incidentally that he was once requested to address a branch of the Theosophical Society. His subject was "Psychic Monism". In a tribute to him Blaxall wrote in *Imfama* (November 1961) as follows: "At such time I could only listen with breathless amazement as he ranged from subject to subject, for his was truly an encyclopaedic mind as far as the welfare of handicapped people is concerned. Often I would go away from such talks wondering whether it was not the complexity of his own personality which made him so sympathetic in all his dealings, especially with children at schools where it was his duty to inspect."

Dr Van Schalkwijk was well versed in both official languages and could use them with equal fluency. He was fond of detail, with the re-



sult that his memoranda and reports might perhaps have been considered too long drawn out. Dr C. W. Wright of the Department of Labour at that time, and a familiar figure at meetings of the Council, related some of his recollections of Dr Van Schalkwijk in *Imfama* (December 1961). He told the following anecdote. After his return from New York, Dr Van Schalkwijk drew up a detailed report for the Minister, then Dr Karl Bremer. This included a summary of ten pages at the end. The Minister returned the report with the request that Dr Van Schalkwijk should summarise it. When it was explained that there was indeed a summary, the Minister made a second request, "to our Louis' ' dismay" to "ask Van Schalkwijk to make a summary of his summary."

His predilection for Latin expressions has already been mentioned. In a letter to Mr Wentworth in answer to one written by Dr Cohen to express the Council's regrets that he had been prevented from attending the 14th biennial meeting of the Council in Port Elizabeth, Dr Van Schalkwijk wrote as follows: "I wish to express to you as the amanuensis and to Mr Walter Cohen as, I assume, the auctor intellectualis of the contents . . . my sincere thanks for the sentiments expressed in the letter". Dr Wright (previously quoted) tells of an incident at a meeting of the National Readjustment Committee when there was a discussion on the problems experienced with some ex-soldiers. Dr Van Schalkwijk's comment was: "What these men need is a liberal helping of panes et circenses". Upon this one member retorted: "No matter what they need, will the last speaker kindly adhere to the two official languages of the country."

Besides tributes paid to him in this country after his death, numerous tokens of appreciation were received from prominent people overseas. Among these was the Director of the American Foundation for Overseas Blind, Mr E. T. Boulter, Colonel E. A. Baker, Chairman of the World Council for the Blind, Mr E. H. Getcliff, Chairman of I.C.E.B.Y., Mr (now Sir) John Wilson, Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, Mr J. C. Colligan, Secretary-General of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, and others. All these messages and tributes are proof of the high esteem in which he was held abroad.

We conclude with a quotation from a tribute to Dr Van Schalkwijk by the Editor of *Imfama* (Dr Walter Cohen), which appeared in the October 1961 issue:

"Every detail of a blind man's life was of paramount importance to him – his social life, his economic life, his domestic life, no detail was too trivial to escape his attention. He was a tactful and inspiring chairman of conferences and notwithstanding his full appreciation of the principles on which social work is based, he was essentially a realist and a practical man . . .

We extend our sympathy to his bereaved family. But perhaps we may be forgiven if we offer our sympathy to those who will be most affected by the passing of Louis van Schalkwijk – to the blind people of all races in South Africa who will have lost one of the best friends they have ever known."

After his death the Council established a Louis van Schalkwijk Memorial Fund to which generous contributions from all parts of the country were made. It was resolved later to use the funds thus collected to add a new wing to the S.A. Library for the Blind, Grahamstown, where the new tape recording department would be housed. This can be considered a fitting permanent tribute to Dr Van Schalkwijk by virtue of his interest in the education and cultural welfare of the blind. A commemorative plaque was unveiled in the new tape recording department of the library on 15 February 1964 by Dr Walter Cohen, then Chairman of the Council.

<sup>1</sup> Elected at 11th biennial meeting of Council, held at Grahamstown on 24 and 25 September 1952.

<sup>2</sup> *Infama*, part 1, No. 3 November 1961, page 3. It was included in the tribute paid by Dr Blaxall to Dr Van Schalkwijk after his death.

<sup>3</sup> In the twelfth biennial report of Council (1952-54) the complete constitution is found on page 41, with the additional amendments. In clause 10(b) provision was made for the nomination of a Patron for the Council. A resolution about this had already been adopted at the first biennial meeting held on 10 March 1931. The Governor-General at that time and Lady Clarendon were invited to become the Patrons and they accepted. Since then the succeeding Governors-General graciously agreed to accept the nomination and after the Republic was declared in 1961, the State Presidents.

<sup>4</sup> Held 31 March and 1 April 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Addendum to Agenda of the 93rd meeting of the Executive Committee held in October 1965.

<sup>6</sup> In the meantime the name of the Division had been changed to the Committee for Rehabilitation and Peacemant.

<sup>7</sup> At the Executive meeting of 23 September 1952 – minutes, page 5.

<sup>8</sup> Resumé of work of the Cape Town office, 1949-1967, compiled by Miss Gillies.

<sup>9</sup> The numbering had started again from the beginning. The September edition was thus Vol. I, No. I. There were 45 numbers of the old Newsletter altogether.

<sup>10</sup> Sixteenth Biennial Report (1960-62), page 4.

## *CHAPTER 9*

### *CONSOLIDATION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT — I*

*1961 to 1979*

We have now reached the last two decades of the first half-century of the Council's existence. This covers the period from 1961 to the present day.

A review of this era shows a consolidation of existing services and projects on the one hand and the introduction and development of new ones on the other. The latter became necessary as a result of the specialised and sophisticated requirements of blind persons. Examples of these are inter alia the optacon, the speech plus calculator, various kinds of electronic appliances in connection with mobility, new optical devices (including closed circuit television) and selective reading matter in the different media for the growing number of university students.

The above and many more make heavy financial demands on the individual with the result that the National Council is often requested to render assistance. This, together with its numerous other commitments, causes the Council to consider its fund-raising very seriously. For this purpose it makes use of its Public Relations Committee and its Public Relations Officer who play a key role in this respect.

In spite of the expansion of services during this period, quite a number of gaps still existed. These not only concerned the nature and extent of the services but also the geographical coverage of the various parts of the country. The result was that in actual fact the Council's activities could not be considered truly national in character. A Gaps in Services Committee was established to investigate and reveal these gaps. The activities and findings of this Committee will receive attention later.

An important development which occurred during this period was the establishment of Divisions for Indians and Coloureds. This brought about a change in the structure of the Council. The circum-

stances which led up to it, as well as the activities of the Divisions, will be dealt with later.

An event of great national importance took place in 1961 when South Africa became a republic and later withdrew from the British Commonwealth of Nations. This fact is mentioned because the National Council, our schools for the blind and other organizations such as the S.A. Library for the Blind, had for many years close connections with the Royal National Institute for the Blind in London, and it was feared that this valuable contact would now be severed to the detriment of our work. Although we lost certain privileges such as a discount on braille books and certain appliances bought from the R.N.I.B. a very important concession remained, namely the training of our physiotherapists. Through the goodwill of the Principal and the Board of Management of the School of Physiotherapy of the R.N.I.B. our students are still allowed to take the course. Furthermore, South Africans are always welcome at the R.N.I.B. when they visit London, and are treated with the greatest cordiality. Thus the bond between the R.N.I.B. and our organizations for the blind still remains strong. It will be shown later in what respect the Council and some of its members play a leading role in the international field.

Political developments in South Africa had an effect on the activities of the Council. Here we refer especially to the establishment of the self-governing Black homelands, which eventually — in the case of three to date — led to the creation of independent sovereign states. They are the Republic of Transkei, Bophuthatswana and Venda. In this connection certain aspects of the activities of the Council and its affiliated members are affected. The first concerns the affiliation of societies which fall within the newly founded states, and the second is the control and subsidising of workshops which are situated in the self-governing homelands. The activities of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness are also affected to a certain extent.

Before proceeding to deal with the outstanding events and characteristics of this era it is necessary to state the position with regard to the officers of the Council.

After the death of Dr Louis van Schalkwijk in August 1961, Dr Walter Cohen, the first vice-chairman of the Council, acted as chairman for the rest of the biennial term. At the following meeting of the Council, held in October 1962, in East London he was unanimously elected chairman. Mr A. B. W. Marlow was elected deputy chairman



and Mr F. A. Peters treasurer.

As stated before Mr D. J. van Wyk, the Organising Secretary of the Council, had died in August 1961. In his place Mr S. K. Wentworth, Secretary of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, was appointed. Mr L. N. F. Pretorius, who was a member of the administrative staff of the Council, was appointed Secretary of the Bureau.

We now proceed with an account of the Council's activities for the period under review. We begin with the Public Relations Committee.

### **The Public Relations Committee**

The Public Relations Committee was established in 1960. It started as a sub-committee which was appointed to assist and advise the newly appointed Public Relations Officer, Mr J. Ellis. The sub-committee, operating from Cape Town, took more and more responsibilities upon itself, chiefly on account of its geographical position. The result was that the Council decided to give the sub-committee the status of a full standing committee. The new Public Relations Committee very soon became the key committee for all aspects of fund-raising and publicity work of the Council. Later on it took upon itself the administration of the Cape Regional Office. It was a fortunate coincidence that most members of the Public Relations Committee came from the south, and that the Public Relations Officer resided in Cape Town. It was due to the above circumstances that the National Council established an office in the south of the country, with all the advantages attached to it.

The first meeting of the Public Relations Committee was held in Cape Town on 21 October 1960. The following were present:  
Elected members: Messrs G. S. Schermbrucker, Theo Cutten, Louis Olivier, L. Levey and A. McKellar White.

Ex-officio members: Dr L. van Schalkwijk, Messrs W. Cohen and A. B. W. Marlow. Mr S. K. Wentworth, Acting Organising Secretary, attended the meeting in his official capacity.

The first task of the meeting was to nominate a chairman. The choice fell on Mr G. S. Schermbrucker.<sup>1</sup>

As could be expected, the meeting paid considerable attention to various aspects of propaganda, publicity and fund-raising. The members were requested to appoint sub-committees in their respective areas to promote the work of the Committee. Reports of the work of these sub-committees had to be submitted periodically, and the Public Relations Officer had to be notified of their activities.

Much attention was also given to the duties of the Public Relations Officer. It was realised that he was the pivot round which everything revolved. He was required to draw up his itineraries beforehand, and to send copies to the members as well as to head office. He would also have to do likewise with his reports on his return. To furnish the Public Relations Officer with as much information as possible, all relevant documents, news items, press reports and similar material should be placed at his disposal. Head Office would have to be specially helpful, as it was imperative that the Public Relations Officer should be completely conversant with the entire spectrum of the activities of the National Council and its affiliated societies.

When perusing the minutes of the meetings of the first few years as well as the reports of the Chairman and the Public Relations Officer, one is impressed by the huge task which the Committee successfully accomplished right from its inception. The members of the Committee were capable and dedicated people. Besides the Chairman the names of Mr Theo Cutten and Mr McKellar White should be mentioned. Mr Cutten used his association with the press to promote the work of the Committee and the Council. For some time he was responsible for a column in a Johannesburg afternoon paper which dealt with the activities of welfare organizations on the Witwatersrand. He gave much prominence to the activities of the Council. He also concerned himself with fund-raising functions and general propaganda work for the Council. He will be remembered as someone who often sharply criticised the Council's fund-raising efforts, but it was always done in the interests of the cause. Mr McKellar White used his knowledge of finance and related matters, as a retired manager of a commercial bank, for the benefit of the Committee and the Council. He rendered valuable service in an honorary capacity to the Cape Town Office. For many years he visited the office almost daily. He continued with this until advancing years caused him to resign as a member of the Committee. He regularly submitted detailed reports on the fund-raising efforts of the Cape Town office at the meetings of the Executive Committee. He considered it a pleasure to render this service to the Council. The Chairman of the Committee, Mr G. S. Schermbrucker, should also be mentioned. In spite of a busy private practice as a physiotherapist he played an active role in the activities of the Public Relations Committee. This included the organization of the Cape Town

Office and the work of the Public Relations Officer. As regards the office, he chiefly concerned himself with the affairs of the staff. He believed that the key to the success of any undertaking is to be found in a satisfied and efficient office personnel. Consequently he succeeded in obtaining the services of competent and dedicated persons. In regard to this, he stated his case so convincingly at meetings of the Executive Committee and the Council that it seldom occurred that his requests were not acceded to.

A problem with which the Committee and the Republic Relations Officer had to cope, especially in the initial years, was the resistance of affiliated societies to the raising of funds by the National Council in areas where they themselves were active. This matter was at one stage brought up at practically every meeting of the Executive Committee and the Council. This intrusion of the Council on the local terrain caused much ill feeling at times. Various proposals were considered, some of which were accepted. This resulted in a measure of agreement. In most cases a percentage of such funds was handed over to the local organization. In other cases agreements were concluded for the distribution of the funds among the various associations which operated in a particular area. Matters were settled amicably, however, as time went on. We also find that in later years, when the various organizations had become financially stabilised, the problem of intrusion on one another's domain virtually disappeared, so that there are hardly any signs of friction at the present day.

The creation of the post of Public Relations Officer was a forward and advantageous step by the Council. The Committee was fortunate in finding a capable person in Mr J. Ellis to fill the post. He was well versed in the activities and financial needs of the Council, and as a blind person he could state the case of the blind in a logical and convincing manner. The various reports of his tours, especially those which he undertook in the rural areas, prove that not only did he devote himself to fund-raising, but also strove to further the cause of the blind and to spread the image of the Council. He reported in detail on his interviews with prominent persons in the various towns, meetings which he had addressed, talks and demonstrations which he had given at schools, and especially discussions which he had with local authorities concerning street collections.

Besides the short-term advantages of his visits, it can also be mentioned that in the long term reward for his work came in the form of

legacies, which later proved to be an important source of income for the Council.

It sometimes happened that large donations came unexpectedly to the Council from sources it had not been aware of beforehand, which can possibly be ascribed indirectly to the efforts of the Public Relations Officer. An outstanding example of this should be mentioned here. In 1961 a firm donated the following items to the Council which, when sold, fetched a substantial amount: six new Anglia cars, six new Hoovermatic washing machines, six electric food mixers and a large quantity of linen.

The Public Relations Officer and the Committee of the Cape Town Office continually devised new plans to promote fund-raising. According to the reports of the Chairman, it appears that the chief source of income was derived from appeal letters. The numbers sent out increased yearly until they reached the three quarter million mark in 1976.

These appeal letters had to be composed with forethought and insight. The wording had to contain an appeal which would touch the heart of the reader and induce him to contribute towards the funds of the Council, but also had to state the case of the blind and that of the National Council with dignity and restraint. An addition was made later which would further enhance the value and heighten the impact of the appeal letters. An illustrated folder was inserted which highlighted a particular facet of blindness or the activities of the Council. When scrutinising the folders of the past years one finds not only a portrayal of the services rendered to the blind but also an account of their achievements, their life style and education, as well as the aids and appliances which are on the market, and the like. The folders thus give a survey of the process of development of the National Council and of the blind over the years.

On several occasions the Public Relations Committee considered the establishment of regional offices in other large centres, similar to the Cape Town Regional Office.

At the time there as an active Regional Committee for fund-raising in Natal under the direction of Major G. Leonard Arthur, M.E.C. He was the Natal representative on the Executive Committee of the Council, and a member of the Public Relations Committee.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held in April 1964, following a proposal by Major Arthur, a resolution was passed to establish a



regional office in Durban and to appoint a regional organiser. It was also resolved "that the Natal Regional Committee define the duties and control the work of the Regional Organiser and submit regular reports to Head Office on his work".<sup>2</sup> Thus the first Regional Organiser outside Cape Town was appointed in Durban on 1 July 1964. He was Mr A. Goodfellow.

Although the Regional Organiser and the Natal Regional Office functioned independently from the Public Relations Committee, co-operation between the two took place eventually. In October 1965 the Executive Committee resolved that the Natal Regional Office should be under the control of the Public Relations Committee.

The Natal Regional Office did not function satisfactorily, however, and often showed a deficit. After a thorough investigation in loco the office was closed on 30 June 1966.

Although proposals were again put forward later to establish regional offices in other large centres, the Council, on the recommendation of the Public Relations Committee, decided against this, as experience had proved that decentralisation of fund-raising was unprofitable. Up to the present the Cape Town Regional Office is the only office of the Council outside Pretoria.

After a very successful term of office which lasted seven years Mr Ellis resigned as Public Relations Officer of the National Council on 31 May 1966 to accept a post with the St Dunstan's organization. On his departure tribute was paid to the outstanding services he had rendered to the Council.

When the filling of the vacancy was discussed the Committee passed two important resolutions. The first was that the post would not be advertised but that a suitable person would be sought. The second was that preference should be given to the appointment of a blind person provided that he was considered competent. The minutes<sup>3</sup> read as follows:

"It was generally felt that a blind person as Public Relations Officer would bring things home more effectively to the public and have a stronger appeal."

The Chairman then informed the meeting that he had Mr William Rowland, a blind practising physiotherapist, in mind as a candidate for the post. The matter was fully discussed, and after the candidate had been interviewed the committee unanimously resolved to make a recommendation to the Executive Committee that he be appointed. It was

also resolved that the new officer would work along with Mr Ellis during the last two months of the latter's term of office. Mr Rowland agreed to this.

Mr Rowland's appointment was confirmed but not before the question had been raised as to why the post had not been advertised.<sup>4</sup> This was satisfactorily dealt with. Mr Rowland assumed duty on 1 June 1966. His headquarters were in Cape Town, as was the case with his predecessor.

The position was now that there were two separate offices in Cape Town, namely the Cape Town Regional Office and the office of the Public Relations Officer. There had already been discussions with regard to a possible fusion of the two offices. Miss A. F. Gillies, Regional Organiser in Cape Town, presented a memorandum in which she advocated such an amalgamation. Her chief considerations were, firstly, overlapping of services and administrative work, and secondly the confusion which it caused in the minds of the public. The Public Relations Committee, however, were of the opinion that the time for this was not yet ripe, and even after Miss Gillies' resignation at the end of 1967 it was decided to advertise her post. The person (a lady) who was appointed, occupied the post for only eight months. She resigned in August 1968. It was then decided to incorporate the Cape Town Regional Office into the office of the Public Relations Officer. This was done at a meeting of the Public Relations Committee held on 17 September 1968. A reorganisation was necessary, and this was brought about by the Chairman and the Public Relations Officer. Approval of this took place at a meeting of the National Council in October 1968. Mr Rowland was placed in full control of the Cape Town Office.

On account of these additional responsibilities, the question arose as to whether Mr Rowland would be able to do justice to his public relations duties, since the enlarged office would of necessity demand much of his attention; but these fears were groundless. Mr Rowland proved that he was capable of coping with the office administration as well as with the public relations work. He could also rely on the efficient services of Mrs Carol Thomas as chief clerk, and of Mr McKellar White, an active member of the Committee, to attend to the office in his absence.

The many reports of Mr Rowland's travels make interesting reading. One is impressed by the large amount of work which he did on every tour and the diversity of his missions. As an example one could men-

tion a tour which he undertook along the Garden Route, and which lasted only six days. He visited twelve towns during that time and his activities included the following inter alia: interviews with Town Clerks and Mayors or their wives to discuss aspects of street collections, organising a golf competition with the local secretary, discussing a project with the chairman of a service club, visiting a former colleague and discussing his problems, addressing four public meetings and showing films, visiting the secretary of an association for the blind, demonstrating apparatus which is used in the education of the blind, and so forth. According to the report of a tour which he undertook in the Transvaal a few years later and which lasted 15 days, he visited 19 towns and followed almost the same programme as on former tours, except that in addition he also visited three schools for the blind and held interviews with the press. The result was that articles and photographs appeared in seven local newspapers. On this tour he covered 5 900 kilometres.

The Public Relations Officer remarked at the end of several of his reports that considerable enthusiasm and goodwill had been raised through visits to people who might possibly be of assistance with regard to fund-raising.

He also reported that he had paid numerous visits to people who had for many years already been helpful with fund-raising in order to convey the Council's appreciation.

In 1972 Mr Rowland undertook an extensive overseas tour. It included America, Canada and various European countries. Although his chief aim was the study of public relations work, he also investigated various other facets of the work. Besides this he attended a conference on the education of the visually handicapped in Spain.

After a period of ten years in the capacity of Public Relations Officer Mr Rowland was promoted in 1976 to Director of the National Council. A full report on this, as well as other aspects of his busy life, will follow later.

Following the appointment of Mr Rowland as Director of the Council, the question arose as to whether his post as Public Relations Officer in the Cape Town Office should be filled. Mr Schermbrucker, as Chairman of the Public Relations Committee, was of the opinion that Mr Rowland, although stationed in Pretoria, should still be regarded as the Public Relations Officer, along with his duties as Director. He would then be expected to travel to Cape Town, probably once every month, to keep himself informed concerning matters there, and to give

the necessary advice and assistance. No definite decision was reached by the Executive Committee, but the post of Public Relations Officer was not filled in any case. In connection with this it can be mentioned that the Council was fortunate in having a very capable person, namely Mrs R. E. Ruthven, in its service as Administrative Secretary. She was able to take over the organization of the Cape Town Office and manage it successfully. Mr Rowland's visits were of great assistance, and she also had the support of Messrs Schermbrucker and McKellar White.

The fact that the Council's resources actually increased yearly as a result of the activities of the Cape Town Office is proof that the fund-raising aspect did not suffer on account of this reorganization. Last year the income exceeded the R400 000 mark.

Yet the question arises as to whether the Council, in spite of Mr Rowland's ability to cope with the management of two offices so far apart, should not appoint someone to promote personal contact between the National Council and the general public. One gains the impression that, as far as the rural areas are concerned, such a step may become necessary.

In the 23rd biennial report of the Council (1974-1976) the Director (Mr Rowland) devotes a section to publicity and fund-raising. In giving an account of the activities of the Public Relations Office he touches on an aspect of fund-raising for the blind which deserves the attention of all those involved with it. This concerns the role which sentiment plays to induce the public to make their contributions. He writes:

"Striking a balance between effective appeals for funds and objective reporting on the facts of blindness is not the simple matter many suppose it to be. By yielding to the temptation to reap the short-term benefits of emotional appeals, certain organizations continue to frustrate efforts to improve public attitudes towards blindness."<sup>5</sup>

In this connection it can be stated that the content of the appeal letters and the folders is aimed at striking the balance described by Mr Rowland. The fact that the Director is personally responsible for drawing them up is a guarantee that not only will the importance of sufficient funds be stressed, but also "the philosophy of work for the blind" and their activities will receive proper attention.

The Director also mentions that quite a number of essential publications dealing with the services to the blind in South Africa saw the light during the biennial period. A pamphlet entitled *Services Available for the*



*Blind and Partially Sighted* compiled by Dr Walter Cohen and members of the staff of Head Office provides a comprehensive account of the services which are available; the activities at the rehabilitation centre are described in an illustrated brochure entitled: *Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre for the Blind*; the problems of partially sighted children are dealt with in a booklet called *The Partially Sighted Pupil*; and a pamphlet about *The Aged Blind Person* also appeared.

It should also be mentioned that, owing to the efforts of the Director, a radio programme for blind listeners was introduced in November 1975. *In Touch* is broadcast at fixed times on the English transmission of the S.A.B.C. The panel discussions, interviews and news reports roused widespread interest among blind as well as sighted listeners. The person responsible for the material of the programme is the Director himself. A television broadcast about blindness in December 1977 in which he appeared, was also very well received.

It is thus quite clear that the Director performs his task as Public Relations Officer meticulously, in addition to his numerous duties at Head Office.

### **Legal and Constitution Sub-Committee**

It is to be expected that a growing organization such as the S.A. National Council for the Blind may find it necessary to amend its constitution periodically. Usually this is done in order to make the administration more efficient and to provide for essential developments. Thus we find that a few amendments were already made at the first biennial meeting of the Council in March 1931. This continued at intervals up to the year 1968, after which only less important modifications were made. At present the Council functions in accordance with the constitution which was accepted by the nineteenth biennial meeting of the Council, held in October 1968. In this regard it can be mentioned that since the foundation of the Council in 1929 practically no amendments to the basic objectives as formulated in the original constitution have been made. The persons responsible for its drafting in those early years deserve credit for their clear insight into the objectives which they visualised for the Council. It has already been stated that the Council was originally constituted as a co-ordinating body which could only function by virtue of the affiliation of other organizations to it. It cannot therefore exist per se. In the original constitution and the amendments which followed, this fact was acknowledged as the basic

approach. This, however, was not acceptable to everyone, and the advantages of such a system were often disputed. In certain circles it was argued that the Council could not function properly on behalf of all the blind if it remained merely a co-ordinating body. The establishment of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness raised the question whether the Council had acted constitutionally in this respect, since it had operated outside its co-ordinating function.

When the status of the Bureau was discussed at the eleventh biennial meeting of the Council (September 1952) there were some members who were of the opinion that provision for the Bureau should be made separately in the constitution. The majority of the members, however, were opposed to this. The argument was that it would lead to (as stated in the minutes) "a constitution within a constitution". The Bureau was regarded as an ordinary standing committee of the Council.

This discussion gave Mr A. B. W. Marlow the opportunity to move (with Mr D. N. Murray as seconder) that the National Council should give consideration to the desirability of constituting itself into a National Institute for the Blind.<sup>6</sup> The Executive Committee was instructed to study the implications of such a change and make recommendations to the next meeting of Council.

The proposal was carried.

Mr Marlow was strongly in favour of transforming the National Council into an Institute or Foundation which could function independently of its affiliated members. Such a system would be analogous to the situation in Britain, Canada and New Zealand, where independent institutions exist.

The Executive Committee appointed a sub-committee to study the memorandum drawn up by Mr Marlow. The sub-committee was also instructed to submit a draft constitution for consideration by the Council.

In Mr Marlow's memorandum the principal features of the new body were set forth in detail. Its independent character was clearly stressed. Its structure would differ considerably from that of the National Council. For instance no reference was made to any form of affiliation of other bodies. The country was divided into six or seven zones, each having a regional office under the control of the head office. Each region would be represented by two members on the Executive Council. In addition to these, twelve persons would be appointed on account of their specialised knowledge of blindness. Furthermore

there would be five representatives of national organizations and four office-bearers — approximately 35 members altogether.

After discussing the memorandum and the report of the sub-committee at its meeting of 1-2 April 1954 the Executive Committee passed a very carefully worded resolution which can be regarded as a compromise between the two systems. The Executive Committee indeed approved the founding of an independent national body, but strongly recommended that the original name be retained, namely the South African National Council for the Blind. The name "Institute" or "Foundation" would cause confusion. Furthermore the Executive Committee stressed that the functions of the new national body should be regarded as supplementary to those of the societies already established. This meant that the new national body could only undertake projects of a national nature, or could act in cases where local associations were either unable or unwilling to do so. The national body would also be at liberty to expand its activities in areas where there were no societies for the blind.

When these recommendations of the Executive Committee were laid before the twelfth biennial meeting of the Council (September 1954) it was resolved that all documents drawn up by the sub-committee in connection with the matter be sent to the various affiliated organizations for comment.

Although there was no open resistance to the proposed alterations, the replies of the affiliated societies were almost unanimous in opposing any change regarding the name and structure of the Council. The abolition of affiliation especially, and the fact that the societies would have no representation on the Executive Council, evoked the greatest opposition. Even Dr Van Schalkwijk, Chairman of the Council at that time, considered it a serious weakness, and wrote as follows to Mr Marlow:

"I was wondering whether it was wise to relegate blind societies to a back seat, as it were. The present National Council derives its origin from them, and I should be sorry to see that link weakened at this stage. They will continue to be the backbone of blind service, and for that reason their association with the Foundation should remain intimate."

Although the efforts to establish a national institute or foundation were unsuccessful, a few important additions were made to the constitution of the Council by which the existence of the Bureau for the Pre-

vention of Blindness and the Rehabilitation Centre was legalised. This meant that the Council was authorised to undertake projects of a national character. The amended constitution was approved at the thirteenth biennial meeting of Council held in October 1956.

At the following meeting of Council held in October 1958 Mr Marlow again submitted a proposal for amendments to the constitution regarding the composition of the Executive Committee. Although it was fairly obvious after discussion that the meeting was not in favour of the amendments, it was nevertheless decided to refer the proposals to the aexecutive Committee for consideration. The Executive Committee in turn appointed a sub-committee to study Mr Marlow's proposals with the additional instruction to give attention to other aspects of the constitution. Thus the Constitution Sub-Committee was formed at a meeting of the Executive Committee held in March 1959. Later the name was changed to the Legal and Constitution Sub-Committee when the scope of its work expanded.

The following were the first members of the Constitution Sub-Committee: Mr G. S. Schermbrucker (Chairman), Dr L. van Schalkwijk, Mr A. B. W. Marlow and Dr A. W. Blaxall.

This sub-committee was destined to play an important role with regard to future amendments to the constitution. All proposals would first be referred to the sub-committee for consideration, a procedure which facilitated all amendments to the constitution.

Through the years certain events and circumstances taxed the insight and resourcefulness of the Sub-Committee to the full. Its members should therefore be commended for the manner in which they solved troublesome problems. An example of this was the amendments to the constitution which became necessary when the Council in accordance with Government policy had to make arrangements to establish separate Divisions for Coloureds, Indians and Blacks. Another delicate matter with which the Legal and Constitution Sub-Committee was involved was the position of affiliated societies and schools which, as a result of independence attained by certain states, were situated in those territories and thus fell beyond the borders of the Republic.

From examination of the most recently amended form of the constitution, that of 1968, it is evident that the Council is not merely a coordinating body, although it is basically constituted by means of the affiliation of various organizations. It is distinctly stated in the constitution that the Council has the authority to initiate projects and to



maintain them on its own. Here we quote three paragraphs from the section dealing with objectives:

- “(vi) to initiate, develop and maintain projects for the welfare of blind people, where such projects can be conducted more appropriately on a national basis;”
- “(x) to manufacture, distribute, sell and deal in books, appliances and apparatus specially made for blind people;”
- “(xi) to take steps, by the establishment and maintenance of clinics, eye hospitals, or by other means, for the preservation and restoration of sight and the prevention of blindness.”

The S A. National Council for the Blind is thus empowered by its constitution to fill many of the gaps which still exist in its services.

Since Mr Schermbrucker has played such an important role in the Council's activities, and has also rendered valuable service to the blind on other levels, it seems appropriate at this stage to give a short resumé of his life and work.

### **Gerald S. Schermbrucker**

Besides the services which Mr Schermbrucker has specifically rendered to the Council as described above, he has done a great deal to promote the welfare of the blind in various other fields. As a matter of fact, he is today still actively engaged in this, mainly in the Cape Peninsula. It can also be stated that he was one of the first blind persons in the country to have received training in physiotherapy in England, and has been practising the profession ever since.

The name Schermbrucker has already appeared in this history, and indeed in connection with the foundation of the Council in 1929. The name of Mrs M. Schermbrucker, wife of the then Magistrate of Stellenbosch, appeared on the list of persons who attended the Cape Town conference by invitation. Her interest probably arose from the fact that she had a blind son, Gerald, who was on the point of starting his career as a physiotherapist.

Mrs Schermbrucker was referred to in the minutes on two other occasions. One was in connection with a letter which she had written to the Secretary of the National Council, in which she informed him that a Society for the Welfare of the Blind had been established at Stellenbosch, and at the same time she applied for its affiliation. This was granted at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 4 July 1932.

The young Gerald was enrolled at the Worcester School for the

Blind in 1918 and had a very successful school career. The measure of independence which he already revealed at an early age was the result of a very sensible upbringing. His parents, according to his own testimony, treated him as a normal boy without any semblance of sentimental over-protection.

Initially he intended making music his vocation, but was advised against this by his music teacher, the well known Mr H. Greenwood. At that time there were already a few blind physiotherapists, who had been trained at St Dunstan's, working in South Africa, and he decided to qualify in physiotherapy. After leaving school he went to the School of Physiotherapy of the National Institute for the Blind in London. After successfully completing the course, he returned to South Africa in 1929.

He first started a practice at Stellenbosch, but after a year, in 1930, moved to Cape Town, where he is still practising.

When he married Miss Agnes Brown in 1942 he was already engaged in work for the blind. He served on the Board of Management of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society at that time. Miss Brown was then the home teacher of the Society. Incidentally, she was the first person from South Africa to have completed the course in home teaching in England and was in possession of the certificate. Only three other persons followed.

Mr Schermbrucker's active connection with the National Council began in October 1956 when he attended the biennial meeting of the Council as a representative of the Cape Town Society. Two years later, in 1958, he was elected to the Executive Committee as one of the five special members. The nomination of these members takes place by virtue of their expert knowledge of and interest in welfare work for the blind.

As has already been stated, his sphere of interest is public relations work and matters connected with the constitution of the National Council. Another field in which he has made his influence felt is the screening of candidates for training as physiotherapists overseas. For many years Mr Schermbrucker played an active role in the administration of the S.A. Society of Physiotherapy. Shortly after commencing practice, in 1929, he was appointed secretary of the Western Cape branch of the S.A. Society of Massage and Medical Gymnastics, as it was then called. A few years later he was elected to the Central Governing Board of the Society and in 1937 he accepted the editorship of the

Society's professional journal, an appointment he held until 1945 when the Journal headquarters moved to Johannesburg. He served as Chairman of the local branch of the Society for approximately 30 years, ultimately resigning in favour of the younger members.

In addition to his activities on the level of the National Council, Mr Schermbrucker set himself the task of enlivening the social life of the blind in Cape Town and its environs. In 1955 he became Chairman of the Lighthouse Social Club, which had already existed since 1937.

He immediately breathed new life into the club and also brought about its affiliation to the National Council.

According to the monthly newsletters of the club an extensive programme is arranged for club meetings, which includes indoor games, recitals, lectures, musical evenings, outdoor excursions and similar forms of recreation. A feature of the club which makes it unique is the participation of sighted people in its activities. This stimulates contact between blind and sighted persons to the advantage of both.

Apart from its social objectives the club also does a large amount of welfare work and is actively involved with the placement of blind persons in open labour. One of its activities is the organising of a monthly gathering of blind Blacks, where they are entertained. An interesting facet of the activities of the club is the annual publication of the *Chris Guard* Magazine under the editorship of Mr Schermbrucker, in which interesting and informative articles concerning the blind and by the blind appear. It goes without saying that Mrs Schermbrucker is also deeply involved in the activities and organization of the club by virtue of her background as a home teacher, as well as her keen interest in the welfare of the blind.

Gerald Schermbrucker is well known in professional and social circles in the Cape Peninsula. His service to society is acknowledged and appreciated. No wonder, then, that in 1968 the Rotary Club of Rondebosch, where he resides, presented him with an illuminated address for outstanding services to the community.

## **Placement**

The previous chapter on employment ended with the resignation of Mr J. J. H. Muller as Placement Officer. He left the service of the Council on 6 March 1961. His successor was appointed only in October of that year, and six months thus elapsed without the services of a Placement Officer. The detrimental effect of this was emphasised

in a report by the Chairman of the Division for Employment and Rehabilitation for the period April to October 1961.<sup>8</sup> He writes as follows:

“The activities of the Division sank to a low ebb during the past six months. This fact must be attributed to the absence of a Placement Officer. Not only did the waiting list become excessively long, but research also suffered severely on this account.”

These remarks prove the indisputable necessity for an organised and effective placement service which should be maintained without interruption. Since it is indeed such an exacting and specialised field, problems arose with regard to procuring suitable candidates for the post.

The Chairman, however, stated in the same report that the Division had appointed Mr F. F. Stander as Placement Officer at a meeting on 23 September 1961. He assumed duty shortly afterwards.

Mr Stander occupied the post until the end of 1969 and was thus the person to have served the Council as Placement Officer for the longest period up to the present.

According to the minutes of the Division and the Chairman's reports, it would appear that Mr Stander was very active in the field of placement. He visited other parts of the country on various occasions, either to make placements himself, or to acquaint societies for the blind with the possibilities of employment in open labour and of assisting with placement in their own areas. When studying the Placement Officer's reports, one gains the impression that the activities connected with placement took place mostly in Pretoria and on the Witwatersrand, while the rest of the country received scant attention. The officer mentions, however, that satisfactory co-operation was received from other bodies such as the S.A. Blind Workers Organization and the Department of Labour. Nevertheless it appears that the amount of work in the Transvaal was so great that it was almost impossible for one person to cover the entire country. Added to this was the fact that virtually nothing had been done in regard to the placement of Blacks in open labour.

In order to combat the problem the Executive Committee, on the recommendations of the Division for Employment and Rehabilitation, decided to appoint a second placement officer who would be responsible chiefly for the placement of blind Blacks.

Thus Mr L. S. Watson was appointed Assistant Employment Officer and assumed office on 1 January 1966.



Mr Watson was a blind person who had had experience of industry before becoming blind. This knowledge stood him in good stead.

From the very beginning Mr Watson was most successful. He immediately placed a large number of workers from the workshop of the Transvaal Society for Blind Blacks at Ga-Rankuwa in factories in the surrounding area. He was assisted in this by Mr N. F. Soanes, the Superintendent of the workshop.

Mr Watson, owing to the fact that he had studied psychology at a University, had made a comprehensive study of the problem of employment for the blind, and had written a treatise on his deductions with the title: *Assessment and Placement of the Blind Worker in Industry*. It contained a series of simple efficiency tests by which could be determined whether the candidate was suitable for a specific type of work. These tests could be applied especially to Blacks. The Council found the work of such importance that it resolved to print 1 000 copies for distribution to interested persons and organizations.

When Mr F. F. Stander resigned from the Council's service at the end of 1969, Mr Watson was appointed in his place as Senior Employment Officer. He held this post until the end of 1971 when he was seconded to the Transvaal Society for Blind Blacks. The reason for his transfer was "that he was medically unfit to carry out the strenuous duties required by the Post of Senior Employment Officer".<sup>9</sup>

According to reports, Mr Watson did excellent work in his new occupation. Unfortunately he was obliged to resign in 1975 on account of a further deterioration in his health. His enforced disappearance from the scene left a much felt vacancy and was a severe setback for the efforts of the Council to establish an effective placement service for blind Blacks.

An important occurrence in connection with sheltered employment and rehabilitation in this period was the study tour undertaken by the chairman of the Division for Employment and Rehabilitation, Mr L. C. Jervis, to Britain and the continent of Europe during 1966. He submitted two reports after his return. The first dealt with rehabilitation and the second mainly with the organization of workshops for the blind.

He visited ten centres for the rehabilitation of the visually handicapped – eight in England, one in Holland, and one in Germany. His findings resulted in considerable changes in the rehabilitation programme of our own centre.

Amongst other things he stressed that placement in suitable employment should be the ultimate aim of rehabilitation and in this regard mentioned the important role played by the Department of Labour in England. The use of leisure time should also receive attention. In Germany he was chiefly impressed by the purposeful training for open labour which inter alia included sophisticated equipment such as power tools, light machinery and lathes. Qualified personnel were responsible for this intensive training.

He concluded the report with a section on objectives in which he specially stressed the importance of rehabilitative training with a view to widening the field of employment. He stated that in order to establish an effective rehabilitation programme and to involve a large number of blind persons, it was essential that our rehabilitation programme be considerably extended.

In connection with his study of sheltered employment, Mr Jervis visited seven workshops for the blind in England, one in Holland and one in Germany. He also expressed views on the report of a committee of inquiry which the British government had appointed to investigate matters concerning workshops for the blind.

Mr Jervis's findings in regard to the situation in Europe were that the traditional avenues of employment for the blind such as the making of baskets and other cane work, weaving and knitting, etc., were not remunerative any longer, and should be gradually phased out. In place thereof articles should be produced which are manufactured in ordinary factories such as plasticware, soap products, metal components and so forth.

One important aspect of the new trend in workshops for the blind is the importance of mechanisation. Mr Jervis therefore strongly advocated its introduction into our workshops:

"In South Africa I advocate acceptance of the principle of mechanisation, by teaching the use of power tools and machinery wherever that teaching can be absorbed; obviously not all blind people are suited to this work, or can be re-trained."

Mr Jervis's reports form a real contribution to the philosophy of rehabilitation and the employment of blind persons in sheltered workshops.

As regards placement in open labour in this country, by far the greatest number of blind people occupy posts as telephonists. The report of

the Employment Officer for Whites for the period April to August 1967 can serve as an illustration:

Of the 33 cases which had been placed during that period, 27 were telephonists, i.e. more than 80 per cent. The others were as follows: 3 machine operators, one apprentice cabinetmaker (partially sighted), one clerk (partially sighted) and one sanitary caretaker with a municipality (partially sighted).

In his report the employment officer (Mr F. F. Stander) stated that the demand for machine operators exceeded the supply. Lack of training facilities was the reason why more persons could not be placed in this field.

Concern was sometimes expressed about the large number of placements in telephony instead of in other forms of employment. The danger existed that on account of new developments in the construction of switchboards, blind people might in future not be able to operate them. Therefore representations were made to the Post Office authorities on various occasions to make adjustments to certain switchboards to enable blind persons to operate them. The Post Office officials were always very obliging, with the result that switchboard operation is still an important avenue of employment for people with impaired sight.

The Council and the Division were constantly concerned about keeping the standard of training on the highest level and ensuring that those who were placed in employment gave of their best to their employers. Several conferences in connection with this were held down the years, the most recent having taken place on 25 January 1974. The subject was: "The revision of norms for the training of blind and partially sighted telephonists, and the uniform application of same." Delegates from interested organizations as well as representatives of the General and Technical Divisions of the Post Office attended. According to the minutes the Chairman, at the close of the conference, addressed a special word of appreciation to the Post Office for its participation with regard to the certification and employment of telephonists with impaired sight.

When Mr Watson was seconded to the Transvaal Society for Blind Blacks on 1 December 1971, preparations were immediately made to fill his post at the Council. At that time Mrs A. van der Walt was the Assistant Employment Officer, but she resigned shortly afterwards. At a meeting of the Committee<sup>10</sup> held on 26 February 1972 the candidature

of Mr H. B. Roux was discussed, and it was agreed that after a period of training at the Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre the Chairman be authorised to make a recommendation in connection with his appointment. This procedure was followed because Mr Roux was partially sighted and it had to be determined, as stated in the minutes: "whether he is able to cope with his own sight difficulty in connection with the work required of him".

Mr Roux was appointed to the post of Assistant Employment Officer and assumed duty on 22 March 1972. On 1 November 1972 he was promoted to Senior Employment Officer.

In his report for the period 1 September to 31 December 1972 (probably his first) he covered a wide field in connection with employment, which included inter alia:

- "The necessity of research regarding new avenues of employment;
- The desirability of compiling statistical data, in view of the probable establishment of new workshops;
- Report on visits to persons already placed and follow-up work done;
- Placements executed;
- List of cases receiving attention;
- The position with regard to the placement of non-Whites;
- Matters concerning university students;
- Recommendations to the council for the creation of more posts of placement officers and procedures with regard to follow-up work."

Thus it is evident that Mr Roux very soon gained a clear conception concerning the implications of the placement of blind persons in open labour.

In connection with Mr Roux's field of operation, indeed also that of former employment officers, the question arose as to how far he should be active in the rest of the country. Criticism that employment officers<sup>11</sup> worked mainly in the environs of Pretoria and the Witwatersrand had come from other areas. Mr Roux consequently drew up a programme which would include other areas as well. He visited some of those places, but was criticised because his visit of only a few days at a centre was considered too short to produce any results. The matter was discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee held in May 1972, and it was resolved that local societies or branches of the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization should co-operate as closely as possible



with the employment officer and refer cases to him at their discretion. A section of the resolution reads as follows:

“Should the local society or branch of the Blind Workers’ Organization experience difficulties regarding the placement of the individual concerned, a detailed report be furnished to the Employment Officer for further investigation.”<sup>12</sup>

It would then be left to the discretion of the Employment Officer whether he considered it necessary to visit the centre in question to assist with placement. It is difficult to determine whether this arrangement produced any results. It is true, however, that very close co-operation existed between the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment and the S.A. Blind Workers Organization. In fact, the latter had been actively engaged with placement through the years. As regards the societies for the blind, it is indicated in the reports and minutes that visits to the various centres to render assistance and advice, especially over a wide spectrum of placement, had indeed taken place.

At a meeting of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment held on 28 September 1974 a proposal by Mr G. Schermbrucker to the forthcoming biennial meeting of Council was discussed in which he advocated the decentralisation of employment services. It was then resolved to recommend to the Council that two employment officers, equal in status, be appointed, one for the north (Transvaal, Natal and the Orange Free State), and the other for the south (Cape Province). The locale of the latter would be Cape Town. The Council adopted this resolution at its twenty-second biennial meeting (October 1974).

At that meeting it was also resolved to appoint a Southern Sub-Committee for Placement to advise Council and to exercise control over the employment services in the south. The following persons were appointed as members of the Southern Sub-Committee:

Messrs H. Matthews, G. Schermbrucker, H. V. Becker and C. de Klerk.

The first task of the Sub-Committee was to fill the post of employment officer for the south. Miss L. Cairns, who was a qualified social worker, was appointed and assumed duty on 1 May 1975.

During the first two months she orientated herself in the work by paying visits to various centres and holding interviews with persons there. This took her to Worcester, Port Elizabeth and Durban. Her report indicated that she had gained a thorough knowledge over a very

wide spectrum of provision of services to the blind. In Cape Town itself there was good co-operation between her, the Lighthouse Club, which also undertook placements, and the Division for Coloured Blind.

When it came to definite placement, however, she did not meet with equal success. Her chief complaint was that the majority of blind persons who had applied for employment in open labour had no basic training. This impeded her efforts, and finding the situation becoming steadily more unsatisfactory, she relinquished the post on 4 June 1976.

Although it was resolved not to appoint a successor to Miss Cairns, the Southern Sub-Committee decided that it would be better not to dissolve, but to keep a watch over the situation with a view to further possible developments. In the meantime the employment services in the south would be managed by Mr Graham Pitt, honorary placement officer of the Lighthouse Club, and Mr John Davis, Secretary of the Division for Coloured Blind.

As regards the northern employment services, it should be mentioned that Mr Roux resigned from his post in October 1974. After two other persons had filled the post for brief periods, Mr Gordon Campbell, a blind telephonist, was appointed as Placement Officer. He assumed duty on 1 July 1975.

After a short term of orientation in which he had visited institutions and had conferred with experienced persons in the field he applied himself assiduously to his task. This is indicated in his first report which appeared on 11 August 1975 in which he gave a broad outline of the conditions which prevailed at that time. Besides other activities, he did follow-up work with regard to recently placed persons, investigated outstanding placements, paid visits to the Johannesburg Society for the Blind and the Rehabilitation Centre, and discussed the situation concerning blind Indians with the officials of the local society in Durban and the school in Pietermaritzburg.

After this period of preparation he started with placements, and immediately achieved success.

Appreciation for his services came from the Division for Indian Blind in terms of a resolution which had been adopted at the biennial meeting of the Division, held in July 1976.

On account of the prevailing economic climate it became increasingly difficult to place blind persons in employment, especially in 1977 and 1978. This situation is reflected in the reports of the placement officer for those years.

Mr Campbell is still the incumbent of the post.

Since the establishment of the Committee for Placement and the appointment of the first placement officer, the participation of the Department of Labour in the matter was often under discussion. The council had made representations to the Department for the subsidisation of the post of Placement Officer on several occasions, but it was repeatedly refused. The view of the Department was that officially it was the only body responsible for the placement of all handicapped persons and had the necessary machinery to perform the task. The Council questioned this viewpoint, and was of the opinion that the Department did not have the necessary expertise to deal successfully with the placement of blind persons in employment. Consequently the following motion was adopted at the twenty-third biennial meeting of Council held in October 1976:

“That the Department of Labour be requested to make an expert at the Head Office of the Department of Labour available to Council, with whom Council could negotiate and who could assist with the placement of the blind in open labour.”<sup>13</sup>

Another development was that the Executive Committee, at a meeting held in October 1976, resolved “that the Committee for Rehabilitation and Placement<sup>14</sup> be sub-divided into a Committee for Rehabilitation and a Committee for Placement”.

It was also resolved that close liaison between the two committees be maintained by way of mutual membership of the chairmen.

After the members of the two committees had been appointed at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 23 October 1976, Mr C. Venter was elected Chairman of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Mr D. van Niekerk Chairman of the Committee for Placement.

Concerning the question of employment for the blind, quite a number of articles and documents had made their appearance. These were in the form of written addresses, reports and extensive study and research literature. As regards the latter, we can mention two. The first is an unpublished doctoral thesis of Jan J. de Villiers: *Blindness — a Social Problem* (1956). The second is of more recent date: *White Blind Persons in the Transvaal: A Socio-economic Survey of their Living Conditions* (1972). This is a publication of the Human Sciences Research Council. The researcher was C. van den Burgh. In 1976 a similar survey was made by the same researcher in respect of the Indian community. It is called:

*The Socio-economic position of Indian blind persons in Natal.* A doctoral thesis by P. E. Biesenbach should also be mentioned: The title is: *Die Blinde-Instituut te Worcester (1945)* in which the question of employment of the blind is dealt with. Dr Biesenbach had made a survey of the work conditions and incomes of a number of blind persons in this country.

At the twenty-third biennial meeting of the National Council held in October 1976, Mr Theo Pauw, Chairman of the Council, delivered an informative address entitled: *Placement of the Blind in South Africa*. It not only depicts the present state of affairs with regard to employment in open labour, but also the trends in sheltered workshops. He stressed the desirability of education up to matriculation standard in all schools for the visually handicapped, since experience had proved that such a policy promotes placement in open labour. To prove this Mr Pauw stated "that approximately 85 per cent of the school-leavers at the School for the Blind at Worcester had entered open labour in recent years".

As regards sheltered employment in the various workshops, he maintained that matters were not satisfactory everywhere. His criticism was directed especially at Managers and Managements of workshops who do not have the necessary drive and business acumen. The Managers are the specialists who should be particularly well informed concerning blindness, related employment problems, prevailing tendencies and developments in the types of work done by blind people elsewhere. No initiative can be expected where Managers are incapable or unwilling to give guidance.

Mr Pauw ended his address by posing the following question:

"Are we prepared to sit and wait, perhaps to mark time, or will energetic and inspired leadership give the answer to our endeavour to bring about changes for which the time is already long overdue?"

As an annexure to the address Mr Pauw gave an analysis of a survey he had made "to gather specific information and views concerning the present state of affairs in regard to the placement of the visually handicapped".

This survey, with the inference which can be made from it, paints no reassuring picture of the general economic position of our blind population. Much has still to be done. The address and its annexure should receive the serious attention of interested bodies such as societies for



the blind, managements of workshops, and the State Departments concerned.

- <sup>1</sup> Mr Schermbrucker has been the Chairman of the committee continuously from its inception to the present day, a period of almost twenty years. This is a good example of the tendency which existed during that period, namely that blind persons began to play an ever greater role in the organizations for the blind and the National Council.
- <sup>2</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Executive Committee held on 22-23 April 1964. Page 16.
- <sup>3</sup> Meeting of the Public Relations Committee, 24 March 1966.
- <sup>4</sup> Meeting of the Executive Committee, held 27-29 April 1966.
- <sup>5</sup> Biennial report of Council (1974-1976), page 19.
- <sup>6</sup> The name Institute was later changed to Foundation.
- <sup>7</sup> The magazine bears this name in memory of Miss Christine Guard who as a virtually complete cripple in a wheelcar gave assistance and advice to many blind and other handicapped persons. She learnt braille and passed the R.N.I.B. transcribers' test. For many years she was an enthusiastic member of the Lighthouse Club. She died in her fortieth year in 1952.
- <sup>8</sup> Annexure to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held 24-26 October 1961. The Chairman of the Division was Mr J. H. van Niekerk.
- <sup>9</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of 2-4 May 1972.
- <sup>10</sup> The name **Division** had in the meantime been changed to **Committee**. Thus: The Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment.
- <sup>11</sup> At that time the official title. Later it was changed to placement officer.
- <sup>12</sup> Minutes of the 109th meeting of the Executive Committee, page 35.
- <sup>13</sup> In 1978 the Department of Labour agreed to subsidise the post of Placement Officer of Council, under certain conditions.
- <sup>14</sup> Placement had replaced the old term employment.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONSOLIDATION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT — II

*1961 to 1979*

Before proceeding with an account of the activities of the standing committees it is appropriate at this stage to give a brief review of the situation with regard to the elected office-bearers of the Council for the period under review.

After the death of Dr Louis van Schalkwijk in August 1961 Dr Walter Cohen<sup>1</sup> (as previously stated) deputised as Chairman for the rest of the biennial term. This lasted until the following biennial meeting of the Council (October 1962), when he was elected Chairman, with Mr A. B. W. Marlow as Vice-Chairman. Mr F. A. Peters was re-elected Treasurer.

Dr Cohen held the office of chairman for one term only, and was succeeded in October 1964 by Mr A. B. W. Marlow. Mr Theo Pauw was then elected Vice-Chairman and Mr Peters was once more voted Honorary Treasurer.

Mr Marlow likewise held the office of Chairman for only one term, and was succeeded at the following election in 1966 by Mr Theo Pauw. Mr V. H. Vaughan was elected Vice-Chairman and Mr F. A. Peters remained Treasurer.

With regard to the office-bearers, a pleasing aspect is the measure of continuity which has since set in. Mr Pauw has held the office of chairman uninterruptedly for the past thirteen years. This also applies to the office of Treasurer, which has been held by Mr Peters since 1960. In fact the Council since its inception has had only three Treasurers, viz. Mr H. A. Tothill from 1937 to 1945, Mr D. N. Murray from 1946 to 1960 and Mr F. A. Peters from 1960 to the present.

Mr Vaughan remained first vice-chairman<sup>2</sup> until 1974, when he was succeeded by Mr P. P. Peach. Mr E. J. J. Kruger has been second Vice-Chairman since 1972.

As laid down in the constitution the Executive Committee of Council is at present composed of the following:

Four office-bearers (Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Deputy Vice-Chairman, Treasurer)

Five provincial representatives<sup>3</sup>

Five persons "elected by virtue of their knowledge and service in the field of blind welfare".<sup>4</sup>

Five persons co-opted by the Executive Committee

One representative of the Ophthalmological Society of South Africa.

This brings the total to twenty. It should also be mentioned that each State Department which is a member of Council may send a representative to meetings of the Executive Committee. However, such a person is not entitled to vote.

A feature of the membership of the Executive Committee is the comparatively large number of blind persons serving on it. In the early years the Council was concerned about the fact that so few blind persons held positions on its committees, and consequently made provision in the constitution for the co-option of three blind persons on the Executive Committee. This clause was later removed from the constitution when more and more blind persons became involved in the activities of the Council and were in time elected members of the Executive Committee and the special committees. With regard to this, it should be mentioned that at the present time there are seven blind persons serving on the Executive Committee.

As regards the special and other committees and sub-committees, for the moment ten of their chairmen are visually handicapped. They are the following:

Public Relations Committee: Mr G. S. Schermbrucker

Committee for Rehabilitation: Mr C. Venter

Committee for Placement: Mr D. van Niekerk

Committee for Literature, Education and Research: Mr E. J. J. Kruger

Committee for Blind Blacks: Dr W. Cohen

Legal and Constitution Sub-committee: Mr G. S. Schermbrucker

Gaps in Services Sub-committee: Dr W. Cohen.

Committee for International Relations: Dr W. Cohen.

Sub-committee for Workshop Managers: Mr G. Hilton-Barber

Sub-committee for Multiply Handicapped: Dr W. Cohen.

In 1956 the constitution made provision for the election of a President and two Vice-Presidents. The first appointments for these hono-

ary posts were Miss J. E. Wood as President, and Miss M. T. Watson and Mr H. Matthews as Vice-Presidents. In 1960 Dr A. W. Blaxall was elected as a third vice-president.<sup>5</sup> After the death of Miss Wood, Mr C. B. Anderson was elected President. This was in 1966. He still holds the post today. After Dr Blaxall's departure from South Africa in 1964, Mrs K. D. Battle was elected Vice-President. She died in 1972, and in 1974 Mr A. McKellar White was appointed in her place. Miss M. T. Watson died in 1965. Mr H. Matthews and Mr McKellar White still serve as Vice-Presidents of the Council.

### **Committee for Literature, Education and Research**

The Committee for Braille, Education and Research concerned itself initially with the development of braille in the various languages of South Africa. When these braille systems were finally completed and accepted, and the field of the Committee's activities had extended, it was resolved to change its name to the Committee for Literature, Education and Research. The substitution of the term literature for braille indicates that the committee had received a wider assignment. It was now required to concern itself not only with the provision of literature in all three media, namely braille, tape and large type but also with the following:

- Matters concerning the training of blind physiotherapists;
- The granting of bursaries to students;
- Investigation into electronic and other aids for the blind;
- Control over the Central Sales Depot.

It should be stressed, however, that matters connected with the various braille systems and the production of braille remained the Committee's first priority.

It has already been mentioned that the training of South African blind physiotherapists can only take place at the London School of Physiotherapy of the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Bursaries for the course are provided by the Department of National Education in co-operation with the Department of Labour, from funds made available by the Readjustment Board.<sup>6</sup> The bursaries cover the costs of the course, which lasts three years. At the beginning of the sixties the tuition fees rose continually and amounted to approximately R5 000 per student for the three-year course. On account of this voices were raised, also by the then Department of Education, Arts and Science, to



the effect that the possibility of training blind physiotherapists in this country should be investigated.

The person who especially concerned himself with the matter was Mr E. J. J. Kruger, Chairman of the Committee for Literature, Education and Research. He was also a member of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment at the time. Lengthy discussions with the Pretoria School of Physiotherapy followed and the Transvaal Administration for Hospital Services eventually agreed to allow two blind students to enrol for the course together with the sighted students.

On 28 January 1964 two blind students, a man and a woman, were admitted to the School. It was foreseen that such a new and unique undertaking might not be successful without certain adjustments. These had to be made by the students as well as by the instructors. The problems that presented themselves were, however, overcome in the case of one of the students, who completed the course successfully in the normal period of three years. He is Mr Martin Olivier, who at present follows a very successful career as a physiotherapist. Unfortunately the lady student was unable to cope with the difficulties and discontinued her studies after the first year. Although great expectations were cherished for the training of blind physiotherapists in Pretoria, the project had to be abandoned, largely owing to the fact that the Pretoria School of Physiotherapy had experienced serious problems with the enlistment of teachers. Towards the middle of the second year of the course, in 1965, a letter from the Transvaal Department of Hospital Services was received in which it was stated that no blind student would be accepted in 1966, but that their admission might be reconsidered in 1967. This did not materialize. Efforts were then made to arouse the interest of other institutions for the training of physiotherapists but without success. The result was that from 1966 blind students were once more obliged to go to London for their training. The Department of Education, Arts and Science, however, decided that in future only two bursaries would be granted annually instead of four.

The question of the training of physiotherapists in this country was again raised by the Department of National Education in 1977, on account of the constantly rising costs of the course in London. The Committee for Literature, Education and Research nominated a sub-committee to investigate the matter once more. Their conclusions were that circumstances had not changed and that no new efforts should be made to introduce such a course locally. The National Council agreed

to this, and informed the Department of National Education of its decisions. The Department then decided that in future a portion of the bursaries to be made available to the students would be in the form of loans. The Council thought this to be fair and was agreeable.

As regards the Coloureds and Indians, the Council, in co-operation with other bodies, provided financially for the training of two candidates as physiotherapists in London. One of them completed the course and according to the latest reports he is head of the physiotherapy department of a university in Canada.

The London School of Physiotherapy regularly submits progress reports of the South African students to the Council. These are then discussed at the meetings of the Committee for Literature, Education and Research. In this regard it is worthy of note that over the years the South African students have been extraordinarily successful in their studies and on occasions one or other of them has been accredited as best student of the year from amongst students of the countries of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

The National Council has introduced a bursary fund to assist persons who desire to continue their studies, especially at universities, but do not qualify for grants from the Readjustment Board. The assistance usually consists of an allocation for the acquirement of aids such as braille writing machines, tape recorders, typewriters, and study material such as books in braille and on tape. The granting of these bursaries is controlled by the Committee for Literature, Education and Research. Applications are dealt with by the Committee and after the merits of the case have been studied, recommendations are made to the Executive Committee for approval.

### **Aids for the Blind**

An important task of the Committee for Literature, Education and Research is to obtain information concerning the numerous aids for the blind which are obtainable overseas so as to decide whether they should be purchased for distribution here.

Illustrations and descriptions are often misleading when trying to assess the true value of a particular device or apparatus. Inquiries must then be directed to reliable international organizations. This task is usually undertaken by the chairman of the Committee in conjunction with the Director of the Council. It is an essential service, since we have to keep abreast of developments in this field. In cases where there is

sufficient indication that an aid can probably be utilized one only is imported to be tested before distribution takes place.

Today a large variety of aids are available to blind persons, from simple items such as braille tags which can be sewn on to clothes to indicate the colour of the garments, to complicated electronic appliances such as speaking computers and inkprint reading devices.

Most of the electronic appliances on the market are in the field of mobility and orientation, the reason being that the lack of free movement is one of the main restrictions of the blind. The devices are designed to warn the person of obstacles in his way, and to enable him to orientate himself in a specific environment. All these aids are based on the radar principle in which an electronic beam "picks up" the obstacles and warns the person by means of sounds. Some of these instruments are held in the hand, others are built into walking sticks or white canes and others even into spectacles. They have various names such as the laser walking stick, the infra-red radar apparatus, the microwave stick, the ultrasonic device and the optical walking stick. It should be mentioned here that the above appliances are seldom used in South Africa. The aids generally used for mobility in this country are the long cane and the guide dog. It has been proved that these are the most effective for the blind.

A gadget which is of real practical value to the blind telephonist is the so-called light probe. This instrument is used to indicate which light is flashing on the board so that the telephonist can dial the particular number connected to the light.

A device which is manufactured in several countries is the electrical braille typewriter. This is an ordinary typewriter with a braille unit attached to it. When it is typed upon, it produces black type and braille copies simultaneously. The former appears on an ordinary flat piece of paper and the latter on a roll. There are a few of these machines in this country, but they have limited usefulness. They do indeed afford sighted people who are unacquainted with braille the opportunity of corresponding with blind persons, and it is also a method by which blind typists can check their typing mistakes.

There are numerous modified articles for the blind, such as braille watches, chess boards, needles, measuring tapes, playing cards, dominoes, balls that let out a bleeping sound, and many more.

An apparatus which is in use in various countries as a traffic sign is the sound signal robot. It is also known as the buzzer or the audible

robot. When the robot at a street corner changes to green the gadget emits a buzzing sound which stops when the traffic light switches to red. This instrument was installed and tried out for a while at a busy street corner in Pretoria, but was eventually removed. Mention should also be made of two other important aids, namely the optacon and the speech plus calculator.

For many years efforts have been made to invent a device which will enable blind people to read ordinary print. The advent of the optacon can therefore be considered a breakthrough in this field. The name optacon is derived from "optical to tactile conversion" and is manufactured and distributed by TSI (Telesensory Systems Incorporated, California, U.S.A.). It was initially developed by the Stanford Research Institute in California.

The optacon has introduced a new reading medium for the blind. Although it is a slow process it enables the person to become independent of others for his reading. This especially applies to the professional man who can now read his private documents without intervention from outside.

As previously stated, the speech plus calculator is an electronic calculator or computer which supplies the answers by means of speech sounds. A model which gives the answer in braille is also available.

In 1953 the Council established a Central Depot where goods are sold to blind persons at a discount of fifty per cent, plus a small charge for administrative expenses. The depot is under the control of the Committee for Literature, Education and Research. An appointed sub-committee supervises the sales and reports to the Committee. The sub-committee must also advise the official in charge of the depot in connection with the buying of stock. This chiefly concerns the selections of the most suitable devices and articles, and the quantity which should be ordered.

The Central Depot serves an excellent purpose. In his report submitted to the National Council in October 1976, the Chairman of the Committee for Literature, Education and Research stated that during the two years following the previous meeting of the Council, the sales amounted to R50 926, of which the sum of R31 362 had been obtained from clients. It must be mentioned here that large items such as typewriters, tape recorders and apparatus of the calibre of the optacon, etc. are not kept in stock and are therefore not considered for discount.



## Braille

As regards braille, a period of consolidation had set in. The Afrikaans braille system<sup>7</sup> was revised by Mr J. P. van Eeden, head of the Worcester Braille Printing Press, and Miss C. E. Aucamp, a teacher at the Worcester School for the Blind, and published in 1964. With the advent of metrication new terms and abbreviations appeared, and braille equivalents had to be devised.

Certain necessary alterations had to be made to the braille systems of the languages of five black population groups, namely Zulu, Xhosa, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho and Tswana. Mr A. Zeelie of Braille Services assembled the finally amended systems in a bound manual.

Braille Services continued with the provision of braille literature to blind adults, including Afrikaans books for the S.A. Library for the Blind at Grahamstown and books for schools for blind Blacks in the various braille systems. An unusual project initiated by Braille Services is the production of handwritten books in braille by long-term prisoners. Permission was granted by the authorities to teach braille to selected prisoners, and the effort was so successful that within one particular year 46 books had been transcribed.

### E. J. J. Kruger

The name Mr E. J. J. Kruger has often been mentioned in this survey of the activities of the Committee for Literature, Education and Research. This is an indication of the important role he played as chairman of the Committee, and is another example of the tendency which prevailed at the time, namely the involvement of competent blind persons in the activities of the Council. It is therefore appropriate at this stage to give a brief resumé of his life and work.

Ernst Jacobus Johannes Kruger completed his school career at the Worcester School for the Blind in 1944, when he passed the matriculation examination in the first class. He was a member of the first group of matriculants at the school. In 1946 he went to London to study at the well-known London School of Physiotherapy of the Royal National Institute for the Blind. In 1949 he completed the course in the prescribed period of three years and returned to South Africa. On his arrival here he immediately accepted a post as physiotherapist at the Johannesburg General Hospital. After years of successful service he joined, in 1959, the Rehabilitation Section of the Department of Physiotherapy of the Johannesburg General Hospital where he is still employed today.

When he arrived in South Africa in December 1949 the S.A. Blind Workers Organization (S.A.B.W.O.)<sup>8</sup> had already been functioning for three years. It was established in 1946 by a group of blind persons with the purpose of improving the working conditions of the blind, and opening up more avenues of employment for them. Ernst Kruger immediately felt drawn to the S.A.B.W.O. and not long afterwards was appointed honorary general secretary, an office he still holds to this day. He was the driving force behind many of the projects undertaken by the organisation over the years, and his untiring efforts did much to make them function successfully. On numerous occasions he took the lead when negotiations had to be conducted with bodies such as government departments and other authorities for furthering the cause of the blind.

His most outstanding achievement must surely be the establishment and development of Braille Services, one of the important activities of the S.A.B.W.O. There was a feeling at the time that an effort should be made to supply more literature in braille for the adult blind person, since the Worcester Braille Printing Press made provision chiefly for the requirements of the schools. Furthermore there was an alarming shortage of Afrikaans books in braille for lending purposes at the S.A. Library for the Blind.

The introduction and administration of such a project was to rest on the shoulders of Ernst Kruger. To install a complete braille printing press at that stage was out of the question. The costs would have been prohibitive. Ernst and his wife Monica (also blind) consequently started a Braille Transcription Service in their Hillbrow flat in Johannesburg. This was in 1953. Monica Kruger had an expert knowledge of braille, as she had been a brailist at the Braille Printing Press at Worcester. She was destined to play an important role in the project. Initially all the transcription work was done by hand on a braille writer. Consequently only single copies were produced. No provision for duplication could be made at that time. The Krugers were fortunate in procuring the services of several other experienced braillists, and consequently the production could soon be stepped up considerably.

However, Kruger visualised a more ambitious undertaking, and as a result of his perseverance, backed by the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization, the original Braille Transcription Service developed into a com-

plete braille printing press for the mass production of braille literature in the various languages of the country. Braille Services, as it is now known, constitutes a very important division of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization.

The first contact which Ernst Kruger had with the S.A. National Council for the Blind was when, as one of the representatives of the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization, he attended the thirteenth biennial meeting of the Council held in October 1956. At the same meeting he was elected a member of the Committee for Braille, Education and Research. In 1962 he was elected Chairman of the Committee and still holds that office at the present day. He also serves on several other special committees of the Council, and he is often appointed to ad hoc committees or sub-committees to investigate specific matters. As shown in the records of Council he has played a major part in the affairs of the National Council, and in 1972 he was honoured by being elected to the office of Second Vice-Chairman, a post he still holds today.

His main interest, however, lies with the S.A. Blind Workers' Organization, and especially with Braille Services. When any further development becomes necessary, Ernst Kruger is always in the forefront to do the spadework. As the Honorary Director of Braille Services as well as the Honorary General Secretary of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization he bears a heavy responsibility, and his spare time is fully occupied. Besides these commitments he is also the editor of *Braillo-rama*, a monthly magazine in braille which is printed and distributed by Braille Services. This work he also has to do in his spare time, as he is in the permanent service of the Transvaal Department of Hospital Services.

In recognition of his long service as physiotherapist a merit award was presented to him on 30 October 1978 by the Department of Hospital Services of the Transvaal.

His life is an example of service to his community.

### **Committee for the Partially Sighted**

Up to the year 1956 the term blind alone appeared in the constitution of the National Council. Nowhere was there any reference to partial sight. In spite of this we find that the Council concerned itself most definitely with the partially sighted, for already at the third biennial meeting of Council held in 1935 it was resolved to make representa-





Mrs E. Verwoerd, wife of the former Prime Minister, Dr H. F. Verwoerd at the opening ceremony of the new buildings of the Prins Hof School for the Partially Sighted on 19 May 1967. With her is Mr P. P. Peach, Principal.



Group of blind members of the Executive Committee, 1960-1962. Messrs Gerald Schermbrucker, Ernst Kruger, Miss Enid Whitaker, Dr Walter Cohen, Mr Jan van Niekerk.



tions to the authorities for the provision of education for partially sighted children. Shortly after the foundation of the Council in 1929 serious consideration was also given to taking effective measures for the prevention of blindness. This therefore implied a system for the provision of services to persons who were partially blind, or expressed differently, partially sighted.

When the constitution was revised in 1956 a clause containing a definition of blindness was inserted for the first time. This was retained in the amended constitution of 1968 which is in use today. The definition reads as follows:

The term "Blind" shall mean totally or partially or intermittently deprived of sight.

In clause 3(xi) of the constitution it is very definitely stated that one of the objectives of the Council is "... the preservation and restoration of vision and the prevention of blindness".

It can therefore be deducted that the Council and its committees were thereby enjoined to promote the interests of partially sighted persons as well.

The Committee for the Partially Sighted, as a separate special committee, developed from a sub-committee which had been appointed by the Committee for Literature, Education and Research with the injunction to study the question of the employment of partially sighted pupils who had passed the matriculation examination. The sub-committee comprised the following: Mr E. J. J. Kruger (chairman), Mr P. P. Peach, Dr W. Cohen and Mr V. H. Vaughan.

The sub-committee met on 15 June 1968 and according to the minutes it did not confine itself strictly to its terms of reference, but covered a fairly wide field in connection with the problems of the partially sighted.

Firstly much attention was given to the definition of impaired sight, and extracts from the Van Schalkwijk report<sup>9</sup> were extensively quoted. Furthermore general problems connected with the rehabilitation, education and placement of partially sighted school-leavers and adults were discussed.

Finally it was resolved to recommend that a standing committee for the partially sighted be appointed. The Committee for Literature, Education and Research placed the matter before the biennial meeting of the National Council in October 1968. The Council approved the establishment of such a committee and the Executive Committee nomi-

nated the following persons as members:

Mr P. P. Peach (Principal of the Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted, Pretoria)

Mr L. N. F. Pretorius (former secretary of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness and at present Director of the Transoranje Institute for Special Education)

Mr E. J. J. Kruger (Chairman of the Committee for Literature, Education and Research)

Mr V. H. Vaughan (Vice-Chairman of the National Council)

At the first meeting of the Committee for the Partially Sighted, held on 8 March 1969, Mr P. P. Peach was elected Chairman. He gave a brief outline of the task of the Committee, which would basically include the following:

- (1) Determining the norms for blindness and partial sight;
- (2) Investigating the problems connected with training and placement;
- (3) Revising the approach to services for the partially sighted.

After a brief discussion on these matters, it was realised that the functions of the Committee would be far more extensive than had been anticipated, since all aspects of partial sight would have to receive attention.

After the Committee had been properly constituted, it was decided to co-opt persons from a wide field, so that all possible facets connected with partial sight could be covered. Since a criterion for partial sight would be drawn up, and medical and optometrical matters should receive attention, it was decided to co-opt an ophthalmic surgeon and an optometrist. For matters relating to care and employment, the Departments of Labour and Social Welfare and Pensions were approached to nominate representatives on the Committee. Moreover, considering that impaired vision is also present among pupils in ordinary schools, the Provincial Departments were invited to send one representative each. Seeing that the education of the partially sighted child is the responsibility of the Department of National Education, the latter was requested to appoint its Inspector of Special schools to the Committee. It was later decided to approach other bodies such as the Optometric Society, the Human Sciences Research Council and the Department of Health of the City Council of Pretoria.

The first task of the Committee was to find a satisfactory and effective definition for the broad term partial sight. With regard to this the

problem arose that in the Blind Persons Act the term "partially blind" is used. Furthermore the term "blind" is defined in detail (with a view to the registration of blind persons) but there is no definition for the term "partially blind". The State Department which is responsible for the implementation of the Act could throw no light on the matter. It was then assumed that "partially blind" fell within the cadre of the blind for registration purposes. Therefore, in terms of the definition of blindness as laid down in the Act, a person may have some degree of sight and still qualify for registration. It should be mentioned here that the term "partially blind" (apart from the Act) is not in general use today. The emphasis is laid rather on the person's residual sight and he is consequently designated as partially sighted.

The Committee was set on finding a definition for partial sight which would be acceptable to the authorities, for its main objective was the registration of partially sighted persons, as in the case of the blind. In the first place it would indicate the incidence of partial sight in the Republic, and secondly it would pave the way to procure certain specified privileges and concessions for this group of visually handicapped persons.

The idea of registration of the partially sighted, however, did not find acceptance with the authorities. Nevertheless the Committee's representations to the Department of Labour to admit a certain number of partially sighted persons to workshops for the blind met with a measure of success.

The Committee had, among other things, made extensive efforts to obtain reliable information in connection with the number of pupils in the schools of the Republic (White, Indian and Coloured) who suffered from some form of visual impairment. A pamphlet containing information on visual problems in general, together with a Snellen Chart and a form to be completed, were sent to schools in three provinces, as well as to schools under the Departments of Indian and Coloured Affairs.

After the data received had been collated and analysed, it appeared that approximately seven per cent of the children suffered from visual defects. Negotiations with possible candidates for schools for the partially sighted then took place. Irrespective of the reaction which was received the Committee was of the opinion that useful information had been circulated to the schools regarding visual problems amongst children in general and the *modus operandi* to be followed by teachers.

Furthermore, as regards the education of the visually handicapped, the Committee made the necessary representations to the authorities for the establishment of guidance clinics at schools for the visually handicapped. The Department of National Education approved of the project in principle, but on account of financial circumstances it could not be put into operation. At such clinics parents would be enlightened concerning the education and treatment of their children.

An important project initiated by the committee, at least as far as Pretoria was concerned, was the locating and identifying of pre-school children with visual problems. After representations had been made to the City Council of Pretoria its Health Department under the direction of the Chief Medical Officer of Health carried out eye examinations on all children in nursery schools in the city and made the data available to the Committee. Efforts to introduce this project to other large centres were unsuccessful.

A problem with which the committee had to contend in connection with training and placement, especially that of matriculants, was the training of physiotherapists. A knowledge of braille was a requisite for admission to the London School of Physiotherapy. This was a stumbling block, as pupils in a school for the partially sighted use ordinary or large type books. Problems were also encountered with the enrolment of partially sighted students in ordinary schools for physiotherapy in this country, on account of their defective sight. The Committee was constantly concerned with placement. On several occasions reports of the valuable assistance given by the Department of Labour with regard to the placement of partially sighted persons were received.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) was in many ways of great assistance to the Committee. At the present time one of their research officers is engaged in making a study of visual aids for partially sighted persons. The HSRC has always been prepared to undertake any research project in the field of the partially sighted.

The following is an extract from the report of the Chairman of the Committee for the Partially Sighted which was submitted to the twenty-third meeting of the National Council, held in October 1976. It is a concise description of the objectives and activities of the Committee:

“An important function of the Committee which also produced



excellent results during this period was the bringing together of the various bodies and disciplines with a view to liaison, consultation and the co-ordination of services and activities. Bodies such as the Department of National Education and the various Provincial Departments of Education, the HSRC, and other State Departments as well as the disciplines of ophthalmology, optometry, education and psychology could discuss matters concerning the partially sighted, and could devote fruitful attention to certain troublesome and perplexing problems."

### **Committee for Gaps in Services**

Over the years the National Council had made regular attempts to bridge the gaps and deficiencies which existed in the services. The Council's concern was caused firstly by the fact that the entire country was not geographically covered by its affiliated societies, and secondly that all aspects of welfare did not receive the necessary attention. Therefore we find that as early as March 1931, at a meeting of the Executive Committee, serious thought was given to the problems experienced by those blind people who resided in remote districts beyond the area of activities of any affiliated society. The minutes of the meeting read as follows:

"After a long discussion it was agreed that the Executive Committee accept the idea of Outpost Officers being appointed by the nearest Civilian Blind Society in those places where there is no other Welfare Society or Association."

The matter was brought forward and the resolution taken as a result of information gained from a questionnaire which had been sent by the Organising Secretary to affiliated societies, welfare organizations, church communities, magistrates' offices and other interested bodies and individuals with a view to compiling statistics and other data concerning the blind. When collating the answers returned, the Organising Secretary found that the reaction from the affiliated and associated organizations was not satisfactory. This raised the question of the demarcation of areas so as to ensure that the whole country should be covered as far as blind welfare work was concerned. Therefore we find that in the minutes of the first biennial meeting of the Council, held in March 1931, the following appeared under the heading *Delimitation of Areas*:

"Mrs Butler-Smith<sup>10</sup> wished to know whether the Executive Com-

mittee would consider the advisability of designating areas for the various societies to operate in."

The Chairman of the Council (Adv. R. W. Bowen) reacted to this by stating that the Executive Committee was of the opinion that such a step would be unwise, since each affiliated society should be free to decide in which area it chooses to operate.

This reluctance to allocate specific areas to societies often created problems and placed societies in difficult situations. In the early fifties when the present writer was a member of the Northern Cape Society for Civilian Blind in Kimberley, requests for assistance were often received from beyond the geographical boundaries of the area, such as, for example, from Springbok and other districts south of the Orange River. When an application for aid came from as far as Beaufort West, the secretary of the Society addressed a letter to the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society to ascertain how far the area of its activities extended. The answer was that they were confined to the Western Cape. It appears therefore that the activities of each society for the blind in this country are determined by its Board of Management, which does not mean that the entire country is geographically provided for.

This state of affairs was one of the reasons why Mr A. B. W. Marlow and other members of the Executive Committee exerted themselves in 1953 to 1956 for transforming the National Council into an Institute or Foundation. One of the clauses of the proposed new constitution stipulated that the country should be divided into six or seven regions, each with an office and administration of its own which would in turn be responsible to the Council's head office in Pretoria. These recommendations as previously mentioned met with little success, but in the amendments to the constitution which followed in 1956 Council was granted greater powers and was entrusted with more duties in order to ensure a more comprehensive service. This, however, did not result in the whole country being served by the existing societies and associations.

The Organising Secretary was subsequently commissioned to distribute circulars for the purpose of obtaining information regarding the work area of each affiliated society. The data, after being collated, indicated that large geographical gaps still existed.

It must be mentioned, however, that the S.A. Blind Workers Organization, which operates country-wide, renders a very important national service in connection with welfare work for the blind. They

have over the years filled many existing gaps, but their programme is limited to certain aspects of service only. The League of Friends of the Blind should also be mentioned here. This body renders an important service to blind Coloured persons through its various branches. There are other bodies which play an active part on a national basis, such as the S.A. Library for the Blind and the S.A. Guide Dog Association, but they are specialist organizations, which deal with certain specific aspects of service.

The decision to establish a Sub-Committee for Gaps in Services for the Blind by the Executive Committee on 6 February 1973 had its origin in October 1969 when the matter was fully discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee. The relevant paragraph in the minutes reads as follows:

*"Gaps existing in the coverage of blind welfare services in the country: The recommendation that a sub-committee be set up to investigate this matter with a view to making recommendations in connection with those areas in South Africa which did not fall within the jurisdiction of any civilian blind society was discussed and it was resolved that it be left to Head Office to make a thorough investigation into this matter and to submit a report to the next meeting of the Executive Committee."*<sup>11</sup>

A report on this investigation was submitted to the meeting of the Executive Committee held from 15 to 17 April 1970. From its contents can be inferred that the questionnaire which had been sent out was circulated mainly with the intention of gaining information about the areas covered by the various affiliated societies. The report clearly showed that large areas of the country were not covered by any society.

In the discussion which followed it was felt that "a more comprehensive investigation in connection with the services to the blind should be undertaken throughout the Republic".<sup>12</sup>

The matter received attention again only after a year had elapsed. At a meeting of the Executive Committee held in April 1971 a sub-committee with Dr W. Cohen as convener was appointed to study the replies received to further questionnaires which had been sent to affiliated societies.

According to the minutes this sub-committee met on 12 October 1971. Interesting information in connection with gaps in services to the blind came to light at a meeting of the Executive Committee held 27-28 October 1972. According to the minutes Dr Cohen reported "that

he had ascertained that the branch of the Blind Workers Organization in the Eastern Cape had discovered 214 blind people who were totally unaware of the services which existed for blind persons”.

It was then decided that a meeting of the sub-committee should be called to give attention to the matter, and also to request Miss Hazel Smith of the Eastern Cape branch of the Blind Workers Organization “to make known the methods which had been used during this survey”. The seriousness of the situation was further stressed when Miss Smith, at a meeting of the Executive Committee held in April 1973, pointed out that the Eastern Cape branch of the S.A.B.W.O. served the interests of 450 blind persons, and said she expected that the Council would be approached for assistance.

Besides the sub-committee which was appointed to investigate gaps in services, there also existed a sub-committee to study the most effective means by which the interests of the blind in South West Africa could be served. A joint meeting of these two committees was held on 6 February 1973 and again on 24 August 1973. It appears that these two sub-committees merged eventually.

The first meeting of the Sub-Committee for Gaps in Services took place on 7 February 1974. Since Dr W. Cohen was the chairman of the abovementioned joint sub-committee, he proceeded to act as chairman of the new sub-committee. The other members were: Dr J. J. Fourie, Messrs E. J. J. Kruger and L. C. Jervis, and Miss H. Smith (co-opted).

It was reported at the meeting that an extensive project for tracing blind people had been set in motion by the Head Office of the Council. A large number of letters had been sent to interested organizations and individuals of all population groups, with the request that they provide head office with the following information:

“The full name and address of the person, population group under which he is classified, age, or as near as possible, problems which arise as a result of his handicap, or any other information of importance.”

It was also decided to co-operate with the S.A. Blind Workers Organization in order to eliminate the overlapping of names.

The reaction to the letters was unsatisfactory. This is understandable since the incidence of blindness in any given area is not high, and in several country towns or districts there would be no blind persons resi-



dent. It is interesting, however, that the most satisfactory answers came from Magistrates and Town Clerks.

Dr Cohen, the Chairman, sketched the task of the sub-committee at its first meeting, and informed members that he had decided to start with the activities of the various societies. He therefore invited three members of the Board of Management of the Pretoria Civilian Blind Society to attend.

Problems in connection with gaps which existed in the various areas of Northern, Western and Eastern Transvaal were fully discussed. This was also done with regard to the Witwatersrand and Southern Transvaal where the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind was engaged.

A matter which was considered a first priority by the Committee was the drawing up of a brochure in which full information concerning the activities of the S.A. National Council for the Blind and its affiliated societies would be given. Immediate attention was given to this and a draft copy of the brochure was ready for discussion at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee, held 3 May 1975. It had been drawn up by Dr Cohen in collaboration with the staff of Head Office. After it had been submitted to the Executive Committee for approval it was printed and distributed.

After this the Sub-Committee met approximately twice yearly, and a large number of diverse matters concerning provision of services was dealt with. It served the interests of all population groups, and from September 1975 the secretaries of the Divisions for Indian and Coloured Blind also attended the meetings.

According to the minutes of the various meetings, divergent matters occupied the attention of the Committee, such as for example tapes in Indian languages, facilities for blind Blacks in Qwaqwa, a prospective workshop in Gazankulu, a code for social workers, matters concerning blind persons with multiple handicaps, the expansion of mobility instruction, assistance received from service clubs such as Lions International, problems and gaps in regard to workshop practices, a discussion of a circular from the Department of Statistics regarding a census which will be held in 1980, the role of Imfama as a medium for distributing information, the establishment of a planning committee, the compiling of a register of vocations for the blind, and the like.

The Sub-Committee for Gaps in Services is very active and covers a wide field. In so doing it performs a valuable service by drawing attention to the gaps and shortcomings which exist in the provision of ser-

vices throughout the country. This in itself should act as an incentive to affiliated societies, as well as the Council through its Special Committees, to render even better and more widespread services to the blind who are in need of them.

### **Committee for International Affairs**

The importance of international contacts was already realised in 1881 when the first person from South Africa was sent to Europe to study the education of the blind. He was Mr B. J. G. de la Bat, principal designate of the newly established Deaf and Blind Institute at Worcester. Although this mission was aimed mainly at the education of the deaf, he was also commissioned to give attention to the education of the blind. This was the beginning of a steady stream of visitors to overseas countries to study the various facets of services to the blind. Not long after Mr De la Bat's visit, namely in 1890, Mr M. J. Besselaar, the then vice-principal of the Institute, went to Holland on a study tour. In 1907 he visited Europe again to attend two congresses concerning the blind, in London and Hamburg respectively. Mr J. P. (Piet) Kruger was the first blind person from South Africa to travel abroad. In 1905 he attended a conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, and another in 1911 in Exeter, England. He travelled alone. On both occasions he visited schools and was the first person to introduce the round knitting machine into South Africa. Similarly Dr P. E. Biesenbach, principal of the Worcester School for the Blind, also undertook comprehensive overseas study tours in 1928 and 1939.

The first overseas contact which the National Council made was in 1931 when Rev. A. W. Blaxall attended an international conference for the welfare of the blind in New York. He had received a Carnegie grant for this purpose and the Council made an additional contribution to enable him to visit various institutions. This conference was the forerunner of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, which was founded after the Second World War. In this connection we quote the following from the report of the conference of the WCWB which was held in Brazil in 1974:<sup>13</sup>

"The international aspect of blind welfare dates from 1931, when a conference, attended by delegates from more than 30 countries, was held in New York. That conference led to a desire for a permanent international organization, which would maintain liaison between all working in the field of blind welfare."

In his report to the National Council after his return, Rev. A. W. Blaxall stated that an *International Bureau for work amongst the Blind* had been established at the conference and that he had made an announcement there that the S.A. National Council for the Blind would readily affiliate to that body. Mr Blaxall's action was confirmed by the Executive Committee of Council.<sup>14</sup> It should therefore be placed on record that the S.A. National Council for the Blind can be considered to be a founder member of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, although the latter, after years of delay, was founded only in 1949. International events on the political scene were evidently responsible for this.

Among several recommendations made by Mr Blaxall, there were two which deserve to be mentioned. One of them led to the sending of a person overseas to be trained as an instructor in various trades for the blind. He was Mr G. H. Biesenbach, who held the post of vocational instructor at the Worcester School for the Blind. Mr Biesenbach spent fifteen months in England at various institutions. It is interesting to note that Mr Biesenbach in his report advocated inter alia the admission of partially sighted persons to workshops, a matter which only came into effect many years later. The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 22 June 1934 read as follows:

“Mr Biesenbach felt that the exclusion of partially blind workers from workshops for the blind in South Africa was unjust and he expressed the hope that they would soon be given the same assistance and chances as the totally blind.”

In his second recommendation Mr Blaxall advocated a comprehensive reorganization of the National Council. It would appear that he was of the opinion, shared by Mr A. B. W. Marlow much later in 1953, that the mere co-ordinating function of the Council did not leave much room for a complete and effective system of service to the blind in this country. As a matter of interest, the following passage from the minutes is quoted below:

“With reference to Mr Blaxall's recommendation with regard to the reorganisation of the Constitution of the Council, the division of the Union into districts each with central depots under the control of locally appointed committees, etc. etc., it was felt that the matter had better be left in abeyance at present pending the next meeting of Council in 1933.”

This matter was not raised at the biennial meeting of the Council in 1933, nor at the following one.

In the years that followed it was Dr L. van Schalkwijk especially who on his official departmental visits overseas undertook specified tasks on behalf of the National Council. Thus we find that Dr Van Schalkwijk represented the National Council at the first conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind in Paris in 1954.<sup>15</sup> The facts concerning this meeting were recorded in the abovementioned report of the WCWB's latest conference as follows:

"After the Second World War the United Kingdom sought a resumption of international co-operation on the New York scale (of 1931), and in spite of the difficulties of the post-war years, a conference on 'The Place of the Blind in the Modern World' was held at Oxford in 1949, at which Europe and North America were represented. Once again, the desire for a permanent council was strongly expressed."<sup>16</sup>

The result of this was that in 1951 a committee met in Paris in order to draft a constitution for an international organization. In this way the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind was brought into being, and it was resolved that its first meeting would be held in Paris in 1954. Thereafter conferences were held in 1959 in Rome, in 1964 in New York, in 1969 in New Delhi and in 1974 in Sao Paulo. The next conference is scheduled for 1979 in Lagos, Nigeria.<sup>17</sup>

The National Council has been represented at all the conferences of the World Council up to the present, with the exception of the one held in New Delhi in 1969, when its two official representatives, Dr W. Cohen and Mr V. H. Vaughan, were refused permission to enter India. The Council was, however, represented by Mr C. M. Bassa, who attended as an observer.

Since the foundation of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, South Africa has played a significant role in its activities. Already at the first meeting in 1954 in Paris Dr L. van Schalkwijk was elected as chairman of a committee for the rural blind. In this capacity he was a member of the Executive Committee of the World Council.

In July 1959 Dr L. van Schalkwijk and Mrs F. Blaxall (who was overseas at that time) represented the Council at the second conference of the World Council which was held in Rome.

At the following conference, which was held in New York in 1964, the National Council was exceptionally honoured in that both its rep-



representatives were elected to committees. Dr W. Cohen was elected chairman of the World Braille Council and Mr S. K. Wentworth, General Secretary of the National Council, was appointed a member of the Committee for the Prevention of Blindness. In his report Mr Wentworth said "that the reason for this is simply because the Council's Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness has achieved world-wide recognition for its work in the Republic . . . The Bureau's work is a blueprint for work in many parts of the world".

As regards the 1969 conference of the World Council, which was held in New Delhi, it may be mentioned that although Dr Cohen had been prevented from attending, he was nevertheless in his absence again elected Chairman of the World Braille Council. In 1972 he attended the meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Council in Moscow.

With regard to the World Braille Council another important international contact should be mentioned. In December 1951 the Consultative Committee on Braille was convened by the Director-General of UNESCO<sup>18</sup> with the purpose of establishing a World Braille Council. Mr V. H. Vaughan was invited to this meeting, which was held from 10-12 December 1951 in Paris. Fifteen braille experts, representative of the different regions of the world, attended.

At the meeting statutes were drawn up to be presented to the Director-General of UNESCO for the establishment of "an advisory committee called the World Braille Council (WBC)".<sup>19</sup> After this had been approved the committee remained under the control of UNESCO until 1954, when it became a committee of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind. It can therefore be said that South Africa was a founder member of the World Braille Council.

The fifth conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind was held in 1974 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The official representatives of the National Council were Mr Theo Pauw and Dr W. Cohen. Dr J. J. Fourie and Mr C. M. Bassa were present as observers. In the printed report of the Conference Dr J. W. Cookey-Gram, Chairman of the Committee for Africa Affairs, wrote as follows:

"This report will not be complete without expressing my gratitude and appreciation to the South African National Council for the Blind through Dr W. Cohen and the Union of the Blind of Tunisia through Mr M. Rajhi, its Secretary-General, for their ef-

fort in keeping in regular touch with the Secretariat of the African Regional Committee.”<sup>20</sup>

Dr Cohen is a member of this committee. An important resolution which was carried at this meeting of the World Council was for the establishment of an International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. The first meeting of this organization took place in July 1978 in Oxford, England. The representatives of the National Council were Mr W. Rowland and Mr C. M. Bassa.

Another important organization, chiefly aimed at education, in which South Africa has actively taken part since its inception, is the International Council for the Education of the Visually Handicapped (I.C.E.B.Y.), formerly named the International Council of Educators of Blind Youth (I.C.E.V.H.). This organization also sprang from the Conference which was held at Oxford in 1949 to which we have previously referred.

The first conference of the International Council of Educators of Blind Youth was held in Bussum, Holland, at the “Instituut tot Onderwijs van Blinden” from 25 July to 2 August 1952. Mr A. B. W. Marlow, then principal of the Athlone School for the Blind in Bellville, Cape Town, was the representative of the S.A. National Council for the Blind. Since then five-yearly conferences were held at the following venues: Oslo (1957), Hanover (1962), Watertown, U.S.A. (1967), Madrid (1972), Paris (1977). South Africa was represented at all these conferences.

It was at the Hanover conference in 1962 that the South African delegates started playing an active role in the proceedings of the conferences and in the organization. At that meeting Mr Theo Pauw acted as leader of one of the group sessions. Mr V. H. Vaughan was elected to the Executive Committee as well as to the editorial board of the Educator, the journal of I.C.E.V.H. In 1967 at Watertown Mr Pauw was elected to the Executive Committee as the Africa representative, replacing Mr Vaughan. Mr Pauw still serves on the Executive Committee and is responsible for a column on the deaf-blind in the Educator. At the conference held in Madrid in 1972, the South African contingent consisted of eight delegates, amongst whom was the director of the National Council, Mr W. P. Rowland. At this meeting Mr Theo Pauw officiated as group-leader on several occasions and Mr Vaughan as chairman at a plenary session. At the Paris conference, held in 1977, the South African delegation consisted of Mr Theo Pauw, Mr P. P.

Peach, Mr B. C. Nursoo, Principal of the New Horizon School, Pietermaritzburg, and Mr J. R. Solms, Principal of the Athlone School for the Blind.

It stands to reason that when persons attend conferences overseas they will also avail themselves of the opportunity to undertake study tours in order to increase their knowledge, and to build up further international contacts to the benefit of the work.

### Neighbouring States

We now come to another from of international contact. Whereas we have up to the present confined ourselves to visits overseas with the object of availing ourselves of the knowledge and experience which countries abroad could offer, and where we were at the receiving end only, we now report on another aspect of the matter, namely the efforts which we in South Africa have been making to render assistance and convey knowledge to neighbouring states. Since this aid had increased considerably over the years it became necessary to organise and control it. A committee was therefore appointed to bring this about. Initially it was called: Committee on Aid to Neighbouring States. Later the name was changed to: Committee for International Relations. Before reviewing the activities of the Committee, we may mention here that aid to neighbouring and indeed states much further north had already been rendered by the Worcester School for the Blind since the forties. For example, there had always been close contact with a school in Rhodesia to which assistance had regularly been given. Visits were also paid reciprocally. During the Second World War a large quantity of braille music was supplied to blind artists who performed in various parts of Africa, such as the then Belgian Congo (Zaire today) and even as far as Egypt, where a blind musician had difficulty in obtaining braille music.<sup>21</sup>

In this regard it should also be recorded that the S.A. Library for the Blind had for many years sent books on loan to blind readers in neighbouring countries. In the 1944 report of the library the following was entered:

“We have readers in all parts of the Union and a few scattered in Rhodesia, Kenya, South West Africa, Gambia, Nyasaland<sup>22</sup> and Mauritius.”

In connection with the National Council itself, we find that the Executive Committee, at its 109th meeting held 2-4 May 1972 approved a recommendation that certain articles from the central depot,

up to a sum of R100, be donated to St Joseph's Mission in Swaziland, on condition that the Welfare Board agreed that the funds of the Council could be used for the provision of services to the blind in neighbouring countries. It was reported at the next meeting of the Executive Committee (October 1972) that no objections had been raised by the authorities, and that Council could proceed with the rendering of aid to neighbouring states. Consequently St Joseph's Mission in Swaziland was the first institution to be thus served.

In time requests for aid gained momentum, and it became clear that the National Council had a task to fulfil in this respect. Not only were requests for material assistance received, but information was also sought in connection with administrative affairs, and with matters such as the registration of blind persons and education of blind children.

The question later arose as to whether we should wait for requests for aid to come forward, or whether we should ourselves proceed to investigate the circumstances in neighbouring countries. Dr W. Cohen pointed out that the Africa Committee of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind looked to South Africa to investigate the entire question of aid to developing countries, and to give assistance where it was required.

In the meantime the Director visited Rhodesia, the Public Relations Officer paid a visit to Swaziland, and the Chairman of Council undertook a tour through Malawi.

When the question of overseas contacts was again discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 29 April to 1 May 1974, the following resolution was adopted:

- “(i) That an Ad Hoc Committee be appointed to investigate the question of possible liaison with blind welfare organizations in neighbouring states and to submit a report to the Executive Committee;
- (ii) That initial steps in connection with obtaining information from embassies in South Africa be taken administratively;
- (iii) That the committee consist of Dr Cohen, Mr Jarvis and the Public Relations Officer with Dr Cohen as convener, to whom it will be left to convene a meeting.”

According to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held 21-22 October 1974, the implementation of the instructions as contained in paragraph (ii) above took place, and letters were directed to various embassies. Replies were received from the British Embassy,



the Departments of Education of Lesotho and Botswana, the Embassies of Malawi and Mozambique (under Portuguese rule at the time) and from the director of the Institution for the Blind in Angola. The latter had previously visited the Worcester School for the Blind and Head Office of Council.<sup>23</sup> In this connection it should be mentioned that both the Worcester School for the Blind and the Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted have been enrolling pupils from Mozambique, Angola, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and Botswana.

At the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26 October 1974 the following persons were appointed as members of the Sub-Committee for Aid to Neighbouring States:

Dr W. Cohen (Chairman)

Mr A. Gorshel

Mr W. Rowland.

As already indicated, the ad hoc committee was changed to a permanent sub-committee.

The first meeting of the Sub-Committee was held on 22 November 1974. Matters concerning Rhodesia, Botswana and Lesotho were dealt with. As regards Rhodesia, the proposed visit of Mr C. H. Tapela, educational supervisor of the Rhodesian Council for the Blind, was discussed. His visit, which included institutions throughout the Republic, took place from 22 March to 15 April 1976 and, according to Mr Tapela's report, was very rewarding. Negotiations were also entered into with the N.G. Church hospital at Machudi, Botswana, to send a person to the Republic to visit workshops and societies with a view to the establishment of a workshop for the blind in that area. With regard to Lesotho, an application was received from the "Resource Centre for Blind Children" for school books in braille. Braille Services undertook to offer assistance.

When studying the minutes of the meetings of the Sub-Committee one realises that aid to neighbouring states had gradually increased, for which appreciation was expressed by the various organizations involved. In this connection it should also be mentioned that from the beginning a constant liaison with the Department of Foreign Affairs had been maintained. In a letter dated 1 September 1977 the Secretary for Foreign Affairs wrote:

(Translated)

"In connection with your question whether the S.A. National Council for the Blind has a role to fulfil in making its aid avail-

able to certain other Black States, this Department welcomes such an idea; indeed, such contact can only be conducive to better understanding. In the circumstances it will be appreciated if you will continue with the good work on your own initiative, and be assured that the Department is always ready to provide you with advice, should it be required.”<sup>24</sup>

A few outstanding events and aspects of assistance to Black States are set forth in the form of a summary which follows below.

As a result of the contacts which had been made, several persons connected with the Council visited neighbouring states, and states further north.

Mr Pauw, Chairman of the National Council, was requested by the Executive Committee to pay visits to countries in Africa, if these could be arranged. It was felt that if the Chairman of Council could make such personal contacts, and thus convey some of his wide knowledge to these countries, it would help to promote better mutual relations.

With this in view Mr Pauw visited Malawi and Zambia from 29 August to 2 September 1972 and paid a visit to Mauritius on 27 August 1976. The latter coincided with a visit to Australia where he attended an international conference on the education of the deaf-blind.

Mr Pauw visited ten schools, organizations, projects and training centres in Malawi. The schemes which impressed him most were firstly the agricultural projects which had been launched by the government, in which both blind and sighted persons participated, and secondly the training of teachers at the Montfort College at Limbe. Not only is the college engaged in training teachers for schools and classes for the blind for Malawi, but also for Zambia, Botswana, Swaziland and Rhodesia. The principal, Brother Rudolf, had already visited South Africa several times. In connection with possible aid to Malawi, Mr Pauw writes as follows:

“If there is an area in which aid could perhaps in future be given to Malawi with good results (if it is desired) then it is in the sphere of the provision of literature, particularly in English.”<sup>25</sup>

It was possible for Mr Pauw to visit only one school in Zambia, namely the well-known School for the Blind at Magwero. This school has special significance for the S.A. National Council for the Blind, for it was the sphere of work of the late Dr Ella Botes, to whom the R. W. Bowen Medal was awarded in 1971.<sup>26</sup>

Mr Pauw also visited Lesotho on 7 and 8 July 1975. According to in-

formation obtained from the Secretary of the Resource Centre for the Blind in Maseru, 20 pupils were attending school. There existed a shortage of teaching aids and braille literature. In this respect Worcester School for the Blind and Braille Services were able to assist. With regard to the prevention of blindness outstanding work was being done by an ophthalmic surgeon, seconded to Lesotho for a period of three years from Israel. Optometrists from Johannesburg paid regular visits to Maseru. Mr Pauw concludes his report by stating that the S.A. National Council for the Blind is in a position to offer useful assistance to the organizations in Lesotho. Follow-up visits are recommended.

Mr Pauw's visit to Mauritius took the form of a preliminary investigation, since nobody of the National Council had visited the island before. It is interesting to note that a blind man from Mauritius had been admitted to the Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre in Johannesburg and trained as a telephonist, in which capacity he is at present employed in his own country. There is a state school for blind children in Mauritius with an enrolment of approximately fifteen pupils and a workshop where seventy blind men and women are employed.

Mr Pauw recommended that the contacts which had been made should be followed up, and that the rendering of aid, mainly in the form of the provision of braille literature, should be investigated.

In September 1973 Mr Rowland, in his capacity as Public Relations Officer of the Council, paid a visit to Swaziland. In Mbabane he attended a meeting of the Committee of the Swaziland Society for the Handicapped with two officials from the Swaziland government. The possibility of setting up a workshop was considered, but the main subject under discussion was fund-raising. Various suggestions were made, among which was the possibility of holding a Trophy of Light Competition, similar to those in South Africa.

Mr Rowland also visited St Joseph's Mission at Manzini, where there were 12 blind out of a total of 56 handicapped children. All of them were integrated in classes at an ordinary school, according to the open education system.

At the conclusion of his report Mr Rowland submitted a number of suggestions for rendering aid. It appeared that methods for fund-raising should enjoy priority, and after that the provision of braille literature, especially for general reading.

In October 1975 Miss Hazel Smith attended an international conference on orthopaedic rehabilitation in Lesotho and made use of the op-

portunity to visit the Resource Centre for Blind Children in Maseru. An interesting item from her report was that the teachers were somewhat disturbed on account of the difficulties which the pupils experienced with "Republic-braille" in comparison with "Lesotho-braille", which they were used to. (It should be mentioned here that the Sotho language of Lesotho is the same as Southern Sotho, which is used in some parts of the Republic of South Africa, chiefly the Free State.) Miss Smith could explain that the difference was caused by the fact that "Republic-braille" is contracted Sotho-braille, while Lesotho-braille is the uncontracted system. From Miss Smith's report it also came to light that, according to a statement made by the Rehabilitation Councillor of the Lesotho government, the blind population of Lesotho totalled 2 400 approximately.

In connection with visits, it can be mentioned that the director undertook several journeys to South West Africa as well as to Transkei. Dr W. Cohen and Mr A. Gorshel paid visits to Bophuthatswana. Besides these the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness on several occasions undertook tours to South West Africa, Transkei and Lesotho, as well as to the various homelands.

From the above it is obvious that contact, with the purpose of rendering assistance, had not only been made with neighbouring states, but also with states further north. Consequently the Executive Committee passed a resolution at a meeting held 18-19 October 1976 to change the name of the committee to the Committee for International Relations.

Material assistance to neighbouring states consists among other things of supplying braille paper, educational aids such as even a thermoform machine with a quantity of brailon, cane, braille literature and articles specially manufactured or adapted for blind persons from the central depot of the Council. Other assistance usually takes the form of visits by persons from these countries, rehabilitation services, and the screening of prospective candidates for the Physiotherapy School of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, London, at the request of the latter.

The programme for the rendering of assistance by the S.A. National Council for the Blind does not only provide for material support, but also for advice. In this way our neighbouring states are enabled to develop projects for the advancement of their blind population. Previously this aid had been unorganised and sporadic, but since the es-



establishment of the Committee the assistance not only increased in scope but was also more effectively implemented. This mutual co-operation contributed to a better understanding between the Council and the organizations with which contact had been made. The Committee for International Relations, with Dr W. Cohen as its Chairman, deserves the thanks of the Council for its efforts.

It must also be mentioned here that Mr Hymy Matthews, Vice-President of the National Council, was invited to become an honorary member of the Swaziland Society for the Handicapped. This invitation was a token of their appreciation for the contribution which Mr Matthews had made towards the cause of the blind in Swaziland. He had donated a Trophy of Light to be competed for in order to augment the Society's funds. This is a great honour for Mr Matthews, and naturally for the National Council. It may be of interest to mention here that both Mr and Mrs Matthews actually played in the first Trophy of Light golf competition at Mbabane.

### **Committee of Workshop Managers**

The Committee of Workshop Managers, which was established by the National Council at its meeting of 20-22 October 1976, must be seen as the continuation of the Technical Development Committee which had already come into existence in November 1962, but which was dissolved a few years later. Both committees were established as a result of conferences of workshop managers.

The first conference of workshop managers took place on 27 October 1962. Mr N. F. Soanes, then Manager of the Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind, presided. A report of the conference, together with the resolutions adopted, was submitted by Mr Soanes to the meeting of the Council held on 1-2 November 1962. Several matters which are still relevant at the present day were discussed, such as the cultivation of willow, the wholesale buying of raw materials, the training of instructors, regulations regarding leave, and the drafting of a manual containing information concerning matters such as increments, conditions of employment, procedures in connection with pensions, drawing up budgets, etc. The conference also resolved to establish a Technical Committee to deal with all matters pertaining to workshops. The following persons were appointed:

Mr N. F. Soanes (Manager, Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind)

Mr C. F. J. Grumbridge (Manager, Natal Bantu Blind Society)  
Mr L. C. Jervis (Manager, Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind)

Mr H. G. Hettasch (Manager, Worcester Workshop and Hostels for the Blind)

Mrs H. M. Odgers (Secretary).

The Committee held its first meeting on 23 March 1963 at the Constance Cawston Institute of the Natal Bantu Blind Society, Westville, Durban.

Mr Soanes was elected Chairman.

All the matters that had been discussed at the conference again received attention, together with a few important additions. The first was the problem of the increase in the number of mentally retarded persons who were admitted to the workshops. The second was the need for an investigation into the manufacturing of new products. The third was the desirability of finding avenues of employment for the blind in open labour.

It was also decided to forward the minutes of the meeting to all affiliated societies which are in control of workshops, and to request them to give their opinions on the matters which had been discussed. The various associations reacted favourably, which proved that the matters had enjoyed their serious consideration.

The second meeting of the Committee, at which Dr P. E. Biesenbach, the superintendent, was also present, took place on 13 September 1963 at the Worcester Workshops and Homes. On this occasion, as indeed at subsequent meetings, the important role which workshops still have to play was emphasised. Although it is necessary to expand the types of work offered, and to change the character of the workshops, sheltered employment still remains the sole method of employment for certain blind people, and the only means of a livelihood.

In a memorandum drawn up by Mr L. N. F. Pretorius of Head Office of Council, which was submitted to the meeting, it was stated that extensive developments had taken place in the workshops during the previous decade.

In connection with the question of employment Mr Pretorius writes as follows:

“Admittedly a lot of time and energy has been put into placing blind people in the open labour market and excellent results have been achieved. However, blind people are still being employed in

workshops for the blind — in 1962 the number was 724, an increase of 40 per cent in eight years.

Today (i.e. in 1963) workshops for the blind employ almost 800 blind people of all racial groups and during 1962 their total turnover was R406 833 and they have used raw materials to the extent of R197 120. In the case of the Worcester Workshops for the Blind their turnover increased from R23 262 in 1948 to R140 790 in 1962 — an increase of more than 500 per cent.<sup>27</sup> All workshops for the blind showed a tremendous increase in turnover the last few years.”

At the Worcester meeting attention was once more given to the manufacturing of new types of products. The matter was regarded in such a serious light that it was decided to make a recommendation to the Executive Committee of Council to appoint a person who had intimate knowledge of the blind and of workshop management to investigate the possibility of introducing new products which could be made by the blind.

At a meeting of the National Council held in October 1964 the name of the committee was changed to Committee for Technical Development, with the same objectives and terms of reference. The first meeting of the Committee under its new name took place on 8 December 1964 in Pretoria. Mr N. F. Soanes was again elected chairman for the following term.

A further development in connection with workshops was Mr Jarvis's study tour to Europe in 1966, when he visited workshops for the blind in England, Scotland, Holland and Germany. His report was dealt with in the chapter on the activities of the Committee for Employment.

Following Mr N. F. Soanes' resignation at the end of 1966, Mr H. G. Hettasch, Manager of the Worcester Workshops, was elected chairman in 1967. From that time onwards representatives of the Department of Labour also attended the meetings, which resulted in closer contact with the Department of Labour.

The twelfth (and last) meeting of the Committee for Technical Development was held on 22 April 1968. At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26 October 1968 it was resolved to incorporate the Committee with the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment. The latter would manage all the affairs pertaining to workshops and

sheltered employment for the blind. Technical advisers would be invited to attend the meetings.

No reasons were given in the minutes for the dissolution of the Committee for Technical Development. This left a void, which is proved by the fact that it again became necessary to convene a conference of workshop managers. This conference took place on 25 October 1971 in Johannesburg. The interest shown was commendable, and with two exceptions all societies with workshops were represented.

The discussions chiefly dealt with administrative matters such as the grading of workshops, the wages of workers, increments, salary scales of workshop personnel, leave privileges, preparation of the annual budget and problems connected with the sales tax. It was also resolved that such conferences should take place regularly in future.

The resolutions and recommendations of the conference were forwarded to the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment for submission to the Executive Committee of Council.

Five years had elapsed, however, before the next conference was held. It took place on 5 and 6 August 1976 in Johannesburg on the initiative of the Director of the Council.

When studying the attendance register and the programme, one becomes aware of the fact that this conference was much greater in scope than any of the preceding ones.

There were 42 persons present comprising representatives of organizations which had workshops under their control and organizations which were contemplating establishing workshops, members of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment, members of the Divisions for Coloured and Indian Blind, two representatives of the National Council for the Care of Cripples and officials of three State departments, namely Labour, Social Welfare and Pensions, and Bantu Administration and Development (now the Department of Coöperation and Development).

The keynote address was delivered by Mr G. A. Mann, Vice-Chairman of the National Council for the Care of Cripples in South Africa, on the principle and practice of integration of handicapped persons in the community in relation to sheltered or protective employment. He proceeded to explain the policy of the Eastern Cape branch of Cripple Care in regard to their project in Port Elizabeth. He dealt with several cardinal aspects of protective employment.

Sessions were set aside for various aspects of workshop affairs. The



whole field was covered. It was also resolved to appoint a committee chiefly to organise further conferences. The establishment of a Committee of Workshop Managers was recommended and approved at the next meeting of the Council held in October 1976. The following persons were elected as members:

Mr G. Hilton-Barber (Transvaal Society for Blind Blacks)

Mr W. C. A. Viljoen (Worcester Workshop and Homes for the Blind)

Mr C. A. Tucker (Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind)

Mr G. R. Hilton-Barber was appointed convener.

Since it had been decided to hold the conference annually the following one was arranged for 16 September 1977.<sup>28</sup>

An important question which was discussed at this conference was the most effective method of selling the finished articles. Marketing research was regarded as a prerequisite, as well as the establishment of various outlets. The problem was, however, that workshop managers did not have time to spend on this aspect of the work and that most workshops could not afford extra staff for this purpose.

The question of blind persons with multiple handicaps once more received serious attention, for this was a matter which was assuming greater proportions every year.

A discussion followed on the possibility of introducing metalwork at the workshops on the Witwatersrand. An exposition was given of what was being done at Worcester with regard to this.

The question of sub-contract work was thoroughly discussed and those present were advised about the best methods of procuring parts for assembling. It was suggested that the Council should appoint a person to obtain sub-contract work for workshops.

The next conference of Workshop Managers was held in August 1978.

- 1 Dr Cohen received an honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1962.
- 2 The offices of first and second vice-chairmen were introduced in 1968 following an amendment to the constitution. Today they are called: Vice-chairman and deputy vice-chairman.
- 3 The Cape Province is divided into two geographical areas: western and eastern.
- 4 Quoted from the constitution of Council.
- 5 In the 16th biennial report (1960-1962) under the heading Life Vice-Presidents we find the names: Miss M. T. Watson, Mr Hymy Matthews J.P., and Rev. Dr A. W. Blaxall.
- 6 This is a board which was established during the second world war for the rehabilitation of returned soldiers by way of the granting of bursaries. Later these bursaries were made available to handicapped persons as well.
- 7 The original Afrikaans Braille System was devised by V. H. Vaughan during the years 1932 to 1938. This became necessary as the result of certain basic alterations which had been made to the English system in 1932.
- 8 A report of this organization will follow later.
- 9 The Van Schalkwijk Report is a report of a Committee appointed by the Secretary for Education, Arts and Science to investigate and report on the education and training of the partially sighted child. The members were: Dr L. van Schalkwijk (chairman), Dr P. E. Biesenbach and Mr V. H. Vaughan. The report appeared in 1958. As a result of the recommendations of the committee the education of the partially sighted was transferred from the provinces to the central government (Department of Education, Arts and Science).
- 10 Mrs L. Butler-Smith was a representative of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society.
- 11 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting held 22-24 October 1969, page 16.
- 12 Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held 15-17 April 1970, page 11.
- 13 "Proceedings of the World Assembly of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, held at Sao Paulo, Brazil, in August 7-16 1974."
- 14 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting held 2 December 1931, page 14.
- 15 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting held 1-2 October 1953 when Dr Van Schalkwijk's visit abroad was discussed.
- 16 Proceedings of World Assembly of WCWB, 1974, page 1.
- 17 The venue was changed and the meeting was held in Brussels in August 1979.
- 18 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- 19 World Braille Usage by Sir Cluthe MacKenzie, page 169.
- 20 Proceedings of the World Assembly of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, August 1974, page 79.
- 21 There is no record of this, but the present writer was personally concerned with the matter when he was the vice-principal of the Worcester School for the Blind.
- 22 Malawi today.
- 23 The relevant section of the minutes (Executive Committee meeting of 21-22 October 1974) reads as follows: "It was noted that the Director of the newly established Institute for the Blind in Angola, who had two blind sons, had visited Head Office and the Worcester School for the Blind, and that he had been furnished with information regarding schools for the blind and services available in the Republic."
- 24 Annexure to the Chairman's report, submitted to the meeting of the Executive Committee October 1977.
- 25 School for the Blind, Worcester: Principal's report on four short study tours, 1972-1977, page 16.
- 26 School for the Blind, Worcester: Principal's report on four short study tours, 1972-1977, page 8.
- 27 Worcester's turnover for 1978 was R1 000 000.
- 28 According to the minutes this was the second meeting. Actually it was the fourth. The other three were held in 1962, 1971 and 1976.

## CHAPTER 11

### *PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS*

Already at its inaugural meeting in 1929, the South African National Council for the Blind realised that an important aspect of its activities should be the prevention of blindness. The old saying: prevention is better than cure, would be most appropriate here. Thus the Council, in its first constitution, was enjoined:

“To undertake the dissemination of knowledge concerning the blind, including the causation and prevention of blindness.”

At the abovementioned first meeting of the Council held on 20 March 1929 a resolution was adopted<sup>1</sup> in connection with the medical treatment of expectant women who suffered from venereal diseases. The importance of supplying information to mothers and other interested persons concerning the care of the eyes of new-born infants was also stressed. The resolution concluded as follows:

“This National Council recognises and deeply appreciates the work done by the Ministry of Health in the improvement of mid-wifery services but would urge a much more active and widespread educative campaign on the importance of proper care of the eyes of the new-born infant.”

The resolution was forwarded to the four provincial authorities, together with a letter of explanation in which the hope was expressed that hospitals and other health services, provincial and local, would give their serious attention to the matter. The reaction was very satisfactory. In some cases problems in connection with procedure cropped up, but it was clear that the resolution of the Council and the representations which followed produced the required results, for the eyes of new-born children duly received the required attention. This procedure by Council, which already took place in the early stages of its existence, must be considered the first genuine effort made with regard to the prevention of blindness. It was also the first time that contact with the health authorities had been made. The following quotation

from the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 2 July 1930 gives an indication of the progress which had been made in this connection:

"The secretary reported that the resolution which was adopted at the inaugural meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind had been taken up by Dr Mitchell, Secretary for Public Health, and by the Transvaal Administration, who had made a circular letter of the resolution and sent it to all local authorities and hospital boards. He (the Secretary) had received a number of letters from different hospitals and municipalities which showed that an enormous amount of good propaganda work had been done."

Up to now, however, it was merely the spreading of propaganda and the dissemination of knowledge. Not until much later would the Council embark on an extensive practical programme for the prevention of blindness.

At the same meeting of the Executive Committee (2 July 1930) it was resolved to appoint a sub-committee to deal with matters relating to the prevention of blindness. It was called the Remedial Measures Sub-Committee. In connection with this the minutes state the following:

"After further discussion it was proposed and agreed that the Executive should appoint a small sub-committee, to be called 'Remedial measures Sub-Committee' and to consist of Dr Van Schalkwijk or alternate, the Chairman (Adv. R. W. Bowen), the Secretary and one medical doctor, preferably an eye specialist, with power to add to their number if they wished."

This, therefore, was the first committee to be appointed for the prevention of blindness. At a later date the names of Mr P. E. Biesenbach and Mrs A. E. Horwood<sup>2</sup> were added to the sub-committee.

Although this sub-committee was often mentioned at meetings of the Executive Committee, no reports of its activities are available. At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 25 July 1931 a motion was introduced by Dr Van Schalkwijk to the effect that a qualified nurse be appointed to do preventive work, mainly among children, in co-operation with the Child Welfare Society. There is no indication as to whether this resolution was brought into effect. At this same meeting of the Executive Committee the secretary reported that the Council had become a member of the International Association for Prevention of Blindness, with head-office in Paris, and that literature had been received from that organization.



It is not clear whether the above activities had been initiated by the Remedial Measures Sub-Committee, but it can be assumed that the sub-committee ceased to exist round about 1933. There is also no indication that a medical doctor was ever a member of the sub-committee.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 14 December 1932<sup>3</sup> the secretary reported that 3 000 copies of the pamphlet *Save the Eyes and the Sight* were printed and distributed in both English and Afrikaans.

In the years that followed propaganda work was continued. This mostly comprised the distribution of information about the various aspects of eye hygiene and sight preservation. No surveys concerning eye conditions were conducted in those days, with the result that the extent of the problem remained practically unknown. Only after the adoption of the Blind Persons Act in 1936, and the registration of blind persons which followed, could an idea be formed of the actual situation with regard to the incidence of blindness. Data pertaining to the eye condition of the person had to be entered on the registration form as well as an indication as to whether his sight could be improved by an operation or otherwise. As a result of this stipulation it has been found by ophthalmic surgeons that a large percentage of blindness amongst all population groups was preventable.

For the first time statistical data could be collected and analysed.

This state of affairs was a cause of concern to the Council and at the following biennial meeting, held on 21 and 22 June 1939 in Durban, considerable attention was devoted to the matter. Two papers were read and important resolutions resulted from them. The first paper was delivered by Mr F. Rodseth, representative of the then Department of Native Affairs, and was entitled:

“Some aspects of the incidence of blindness amongst Natives and a few notes on what has been and what should be done in connection with such blindness.”

Unfortunately the address is not available any more, but the speaker must have stressed the necessity for preventive measures, for the minutes record the following with reference to a motion of thanks to the speaker by Dr F. W. P. Cluver of the Department of Public health:

“Dr Cluver said it was unfortunate that there was always money available for remedies but that when it came to prevention it was very hard to persuade legislators to provide the funds. He felt that there was a tendency to start at the wrong end.”

After the discussion which followed, it was decided:

“That a resolution be drafted in consultation with Mr Rodseth and Dr Cluver on the incidence of blindness amongst natives and the need for effective steps for its prevention.”

An address was also delivered by Dr T. D. Gordon on: “Causes of Blindness and their Prevention.”

As a result of these addresses two more resolutions followed. The first was submitted by the Rev. A. W. Blaxall and read as follows:

“In as much as the returns show that many blind natives are suffering from eye defects which would respond to medical or surgical treatment the Government be requested to appoint an ophthalmologist to travel to rural areas in order to recommend suitable cases for free treatment at properly equipped hospitals.”

The second resolution was submitted by Mr A. D. Kirstein,<sup>4</sup> namely that a department for the prevention of blindness be established. It read as follows:

“That in the opinion of this meeting the National Council for the Blind should now open a special department for the prevention of blindness with a full-time officer in charge.”

The passing of this resolution must be considered to be the beginning of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.<sup>5</sup>

At a later meeting of the Executive Committee<sup>6</sup> the matter was given further attention. Firstly it was resolved that “owing to the gravity of the international situation . . . an additional officer would not be appointed on the staff of the Council.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless the terms of reference and a complete set of regulations for the functioning of the Bureau were drawn up.

It was thus decided that the Organising Secretary of the Council would be the officer in charge of the Bureau. Furthermore the Bureau was instructed to distribute information concerning the causes of blindness, with the purpose of drawing the attention of the Department of Health to the urgent need for effective measures to combat blindness. Efforts should also be made to obtain the co-operation of welfare societies, doctors, educationists, nurses and industrialists in the matter.

With regard to the medical aspect, representations were to be directed to the Provincial Education Department “to appoint at least one ophthalmologist on the Medical Inspection Staff of schools”.

The first task of the Bureau was collating and analysing the data concerning blindness, as obtained from the official forms which had

been completed in connection with the registration of blind persons. In the sixth biennial report of the Council (1939-1940) an analysis was made in respect of 17 263 registered blind persons, namely 1 569 Whites, 1 347 Coloureds and 13 803 Blacks. (The registration of Indian blind only started from 1 September 1944.)<sup>8</sup>

The tables indicated, amongst other things the origin of persons according to province and the various age groups, as well as the causes of blindness. All these data were of the utmost importance, since for the first time a general conception could be formed of the incidence and other aspects of blindness in the country.

Additional to the data obtained, the Organising Secretary, who was also the official in charge of the Bureau, gave an overview of the general circumstances regarding eye conditions in the country. Resulting from this the urgency for a competent organization for the prevention of blindness became evident. He mentioned a few of the chief causes of blindness, such as cataract, glaucoma, ophthalmia neonatorum (sore eyes in new-born children), virus diseases such as chicken pox, measles, encephalitis, etc., venereal diseases, accidents, poisoning of the constitution, and common diseases such as diabetes, nephritis and diseases of the nervous system.

Statistically speaking, cataracts were the most prevalent — 5 172 out of 17 263 cases. The Organising secretary deplored the fact that such a state of affairs could exist since most of these cases could have regained their sight by means of operative treatment. It may be of interest to note further that, out of the total of 17 263 cases, only 735 were indicated as being blind as a result of trachoma, i.e. 4,25 per cent. It must however be stated that the cause of blindness in 4 439 cases was described as “unknown”. This represents approximately 26 per cent of the total. The possible explanation for this may be that not all medical examinations were conducted by eye specialists.

In the seventh biennial report of the Council (1941-1943) it was stated that a “sub-committee was appointed by the Executive Committee to give attention to, and to submit a report on the development of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness”.<sup>9</sup>

This sub-committee, under the chairmanship of the Rev. A. W. Blaxall, submitted its report to the seventh biennial meeting of the Council, held 17-18 October 1944. The report was adopted with a minor amendment.

It seems that the existence of the then Bureau was completely ig-

nored by the sub-committee, for in the first paragraph it was recommended:

“That a Bureau be established under the name of: Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness under the auspices of the South African National Council for the Blind.”

Further recommendations were made and approved concerning the functions, personnel, administration and financial aspects. Amongst other things it was recommended that the staff of the Bureau would consist of a Director as the chief officer with such clerical assistance as might be needed from time to time. Even the qualifications of the Director as well as his salary were decided upon. Lastly it was stipulated that the Bureau should commence its activities on 1 January 1945.<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious from the committee's report and the discussion which followed at the Council meeting that a new era in connection with the prevention of blindness had commenced. No reference, however, was made to the existing Bureau.

The following is an extract from minutes with regard to the matter:

“The Rev. Mr Blaxall formally presented the report of the special sub-committee appointed under Clauses 12-14 of the minutes of the 39th meeting of the Executive Committee in connection with the establishment and development of a Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.

Dr Boshoff<sup>11</sup> in a very interesting and informative address moved the adoption of the report of the special sub-committee. Mrs Blaxall, who seconded the motion, strongly supported the establishment of such a bureau.”

After mentioning the names of all the persons who had taken part in the discussion the minutes state that the report was unanimously adopted. The Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness was therefore re-established on 17 October 1944.

### **The Palmer Hostel**

Before proceeding with the history of the Bureau it is necessary to turn our attention to another praiseworthy effort which was made in connection with the prevention of blindness. This was the establishment of the Palmer Hostel at Roodepoort.

In the seventh biennial report of the National Council (1941-1943), the following paragraph appeared under the heading: *Additional Societies and Institutions*:

“The Palmer hostel, the first and only one of its kind in South Af-



rica, was officially opened on 3 June 1944. It is a fully equipped hospital with 24 beds for the treatment of urgent eye diseases. There is one qualified nurse on duty, and an eye specialist regularly visits the patients, and already the sight of 77 of the 131 cases who were treated there, has been restored."

Furthermore it was reported that a grant was made by the Chamber of Mines and that an annual subsidy on the £-for-£ basis up to a certain amount was received from the Department of Health.

The Palmer hostel was started through the efforts of two sisters, Mrs Palmer and Mrs Alexander, as an eye clinic in a rented house near Ezenzeleni<sup>12</sup> for the treatment of the inmates who were employed in the nearby institution. However, the need was so great that it developed into a fully fledged hospital complete with, amongst other equipment, an operating theatre. Soon it served not only the surrounding neighbourhood but also patients who flocked there from other parts of the Transvaal. The nursing staff was augmented and a matron appointed.

The hospital was under the control of the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind and was later subsidised by the Transvaal Hospital Services in view of the important medical services it rendered.

The activities of the hostel were regularly recorded in the annual reports of the Society. In these reports it was often stated that the need was so great at times that up to 50 per cent more patients were admitted than the normal accommodation allowed. To illustrate this we quote the following from the 1958 annual report of the Palmer Hospital<sup>13</sup>:

"Normally very few crises occur and we get on with the job quietly (or so we like to think). However, like everyone else we have our moments, the latest one started at about 7.30 p.m. in late November. The phone rang in Matron's cottage and a voice said 'It's me, Matron. I'm at the station with 41 patients.' This startling disclosure was followed by a gasp from Matron and a muttered: 'I'll see about transport'. ('Me' was Nurse Jestina Matlapeng, who had just returned from a trip to the Phokeng District of Rustenburg). Next followed a call to the Manager of Ezenzeleni with a request for the transportation of 41 patients (size unknown!) and one nurse, from Roodepoort station to Palmer Hospital. Now, even to a large hospital the admission of 41 patients late in the evening and all at once, causes quite a stir. But at Palmer we have only 24 beds and we already had 30 patients,

so plus our 41 admissions this gave us the formidable total of 71.

The first truck load to arrive consisted of about 30 small children. These were eagerly seized by Matron, nurses, kitchen and other staff from neighbouring houses who had come to lend a hand. Then the adults arrived and the routine was much the same . . . Next day we began to get ourselves organized. An S.O.S. to one of our honorary ophthalmic surgeons, extra beds and mattresses and accommodation in the recreation room of the Women's hostel at Ezenzeleni, etc."

From the annual reports of the hospital it appeared that approximately 200 patients had received treatment annually, with bed occupation approximately 30 per day. Statistics for 1968 indicate that 181 serious and 46 minor operations were performed. The number of patient days totalled 11 344, and the part-time eye specialist held 77 clinics. Nine field tours were undertaken annually as a follow-up to determine the general eye conditions in the surrounding areas. Often patients were discovered for admission to the hospital.

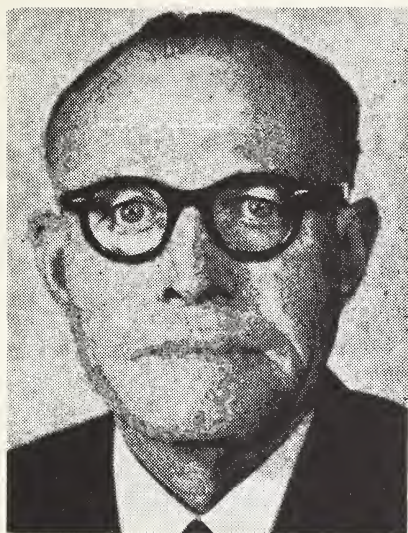
The Palmer Hospital has in course of time worked closely with the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness of the S.A. National Council for the Blind. It sometimes happened that the Bureau referred cases to the Palmer Hospital for treatment, and the Hospital on occasion supplied nursing staff to the Bureau.

With the transfer of the Ezenzeleni Institution from Roodepoort to Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria, and later to Ga-Rankuwa in Bophuthatswana, the future of the Palmer Eye Hospital was in jeopardy. However, it continued with its good work until August 1974 when it finally closed its doors.

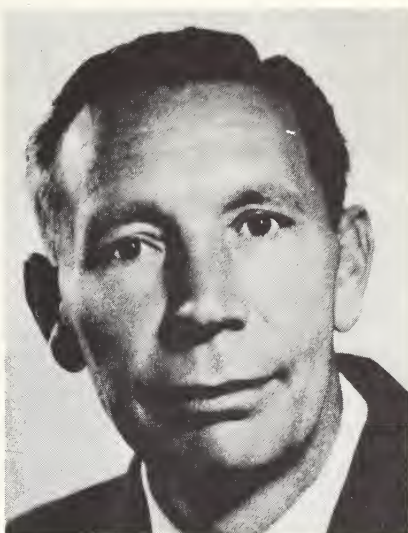
The activities and achievements of the Palmer Eye Hospital were instrumental in exposing the many problems in connection with blindness among the Black population of the Western and Northern Transvaal. It must be regarded as an incentive for the National Council to proceed with the prevention of blindness through its Bureau.

In a review of the history of the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind at the time of the commemoration of its tenth anniversary, the Rev. A. W. Blaxall writes about the Palmer Hospital as follows:<sup>14</sup>

"With a natural pride we feel in some way responsible for two events full of significance for the future of our eye health in South Africa: (a) The establishment of a Bureau for the Prevention of



Mr D. J. van Wyk, Organising Secretary from 1943 to 1961.



Mr S. K. Wentworth, Director of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness (1947-1960) and Director of the S.A. National Council for the Blind (1961-1972).



Mobile Eye Clinic of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.



Blindness as part of the National Council for the Blind, and (b) the undertaking by the Order of St. John in South Africa to establish near Johannesburg a fully equipped eye hospital.”<sup>15</sup>

### Appointment of a Director

Turning to the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, the sub-committee which had been appointed to report on its establishment recommended that it should begin its activities on 1 April 1945. This indicated that the matter was regarded as urgent. Several ophthalmic surgeons stressed the importance of prevention and the possibility of restoring the sight of a high percentage of people stricken with blindness. They advocated immediate action. The experience of the Palmer hospital as well as the data gleaned from the medical forms which had been completed for the registration of blind persons, emphasized the gravity of the situation.

Circumstances such as equipping an office and the appointment of a director, however, prevented the Bureau from commencing on 1 April 1945. The procurement of a suitable person was an important reason for the delay. The Committee appointed to make the recommendation in this connection, realised that an unsuitable appointment would endanger the success of the Bureau. The post was advertised several times, and finally it was decided to call seven candidates to appear for interviews. For this purpose a special meeting of the Executive Committee was held in Bloemfontein on 5 November 1945.

Before the candidates were due to appear matters took a sudden turn when Rev. A. W. Blaxall informed the meeting that he had been in touch with Dr L. van Schalkwijk, then Director of Demobilisation with the rank of Major, and had asked him to bring the post to the notice of demobilised soldiers. The result was that Lieutenant S. K. Wentworth was also summoned for an interview.

In connection with the interviews an extraordinary procedure was followed, which is worthy of note. The minutes of the meeting describe it as follows:

“After interviewing the candidates, the applicants were discussed and it was then agreed that Mr Le Roux and Lt Wentworth be asked to report back at 2.15 p.m. and 2.30 p.m. respectively and that they be asked to address this meeting as if it were a public meeting convened and presided over by the Mayor of Mafeking



... The object of this address to be to arouse interest for preventive measures in Mafeking."

After the rendering of the speeches Lt Wentworth, by means of a vote taken, was appointed Director of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. He assumed office on 16 January 1946.

The first progress report which he submitted to the Executive Committee (meeting of 5 November 1946) set out firstly how he had set about becoming orientated in his work, and secondly what efforts he had initially employed to promote the prevention of blindness. According to the report he adopted the following procedure. Immediately after his appointment he visited organizations for the blind in and about Pretoria and Johannesburg in order to get an insight into the problems of blindness. Among these was the Palmer Hospital at Roodepoort. Moreover, he was able to gather a great deal of information in connection with eye conditions from the registers of blind pensioners, and ascertained which diseases could be prevented. He began making contact with ophthalmologists from whom he learnt much. In addition, in collaboration with the National War Memorial Foundation, he displayed a number of posters on the prevention of blindness at the exhibition of the Foundation at the 1946 Rand Show.

The Bureau also took part in a health propaganda tour of the S.A. Vrouefederasie which visited the rural districts for six weeks in caravans. Placards illustrating prevention of blindness, many of which were from mining houses, were exhibited. The posters were also displayed during health weeks of various municipalities on the Rand.

The Director made an important contact during the first year of the Bureau's existence with the St. John Association, which was on the point of beginning with the erection of an eye hospital on the outskirts of Johannesburg. This was an event of extreme importance inasmuch as it would fulfil a dire need, especially with regard to the treatment of eye diseases and the prevention of blindness among the Black population.

Another aspect of the Director's first report was his intention to conduct a survey of eye conditions among the Black population of the Northern Transvaal. Since this would be the first of numerous surveys in preparation for a country-wide treatment programme to be undertaken later, it is certainly fitting to quote that portion of the report which can be regarded as historical:

"A survey of native eye sufferers in the Duiwelskloof area will be

conducted early next month.<sup>1</sup> The Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind has generously accepted financial responsibility for this work, which will be carried out by the honorary ophthalmologist to the Palmer Hostel, assisted by members of their staff and the Director."

After the Director's report had been dealt with, the Executive Committee resolved (on a proposal by Rev. A. W. Blaxall) to appoint a committee to assist the Director in an advisory capacity. It consisted of the following members:

Rev. A. W. Blaxall

Dr E. Franks

Dr P. Boshoff

Mr C. W. Kops

Mrs H. Wiley

Mr D. N. Murray.

No chairman was appointed and the Director acted as convener.

It is significant that two ophthalmologists were appointed, namely Dr E. Franks of Pretoria and Dr P. Boshoff of Johannesburg. It must be regarded as a recognition of the extremely important role which the medical profession had to play in the field of the prevention of blindness.

Later on five more ophthalmologists were co-opted to the committee, as well as representatives of the Departments of Health and Native Affairs and Mrs F. Blaxall, then matron of the Palmer Eye Hospital.

## Surveys

As was envisaged by the Director in his first report<sup>17</sup> the Bureau regarded the conducting of surveys in various parts of the country as of prime importance. To carry out this task it was essential to obtain the services of medical specialists. The National Council was fortunate in finding ophthalmic surgeons who would do the work on an honorary basis. As early as 1945 the Council had, by means of a notice in the medical press, invited eye specialists to offer their services to the Bureau on a voluntary and honorary basis.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee, held on 5 November 1945, the Organising Secretary of the Council announced that twelve ophthalmic surgeons had expressed their willingness to be of service.<sup>18</sup> The surveys would be conducted under the personal supervision of the Director of the Bureau who would be responsible for the organization side.

It was reported in the ninth biennial report of the Council that during 1947 six ophthalmological surveys had been conducted. These took place in the following areas: Louis Trichardt, Letaba, Bochem in the Transvaal, Thaba 'Nchu in the Orange Free State, and Oudtshoorn and King William's Town in the Cape province. All the surveys were of Black and Coloured groups. The following is a summary of the data which was obtained:<sup>19</sup>

	Number Examined	Trachoma	Keratitis	Cataract	Corneal Scars	Pterygia	Squints	Conjunctivitis	Glaucoma	General	Number with eye diseases
Oudtshoorn	1 481	108	-	39	100	34	31	143	6	97	558
King William's Town	403	8	140	83	4	-	-	-	9	49	293
Thaba 'Nchu	1 086	4	-	41	30	7	10	34	17	53	196
Bochem	699	9	19	24	86	8	9	143	4	66	368
Louise Trichardt	1 832	428	-	88	89	-	-	-	14	277	896
Letaba	600	84	-	11	25	8	2	108	3	58	299
TOTAL	6 101	641	159	286	334	57	52	428	53	600	2 610

An analysis of the above table showed clearly that trachoma<sup>20</sup> was the most prevalent eye disease and was predominant in certain areas. Out of 2 610 eye conditions, 641 were diagnosed as trachoma, i.e. 24,6 per cent. In certain districts such as Louis Trichardt the percentage was much higher. Out of 896 cases with some or other eye disease, 428 proved to be sufferers of trachoma, namely 47,8 per cent.

As a result of the findings obtained from the initial surveys the Director, assisted by the ophthalmologists, had already begun to devise plans for the treatment of at least some of the most urgent cases. In this connection he wrote as follows:

"Wherever possible, cases have been referred to hospitals for treatment, but facilities for eye cases are hopelessly inadequate and many cases cannot be treated owing to non-existence of local facilities. With a comparatively small capital outlay, mobile field units can be inaugurated and a team of specially trained and selected workers under the direction of an ophthalmologist can do much to prevent blindness and save the country thousands of pounds per annum in blind pensions alone. Eighty per cent of the blindness amongst the non-Europeans is easily preventable."<sup>21</sup>

It is significant that as early as 1947 consideration had already been given to the establishment of a mobile clinic, although it was only launched five years later, in 1952.

As more surveys were conducted, the problems connected with trachoma began to unfold. In the tenth biennial report of the Council (1948-1949) data were gleaned from further surveys which had been conducted in eight areas. These included areas surrounding the following cities, towns and regions: Potgietersrust, Sekukuniland, Warmbaths/Nylstroom, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Alexandra Township (near Johannesburg), Langa/Bokmakierie (near Cape Town) and Lesotho. In the three Northern Transvaal regions which were covered by these surveys, there were 2 928 cases of trachoma out of a total of 4 731 persons who suffered from eye complaints, which means 61,9 per cent. With regard to the eight areas, there were 3 167 persons with trachoma out of a total of 5 933 suffering from eye diseases, i.e. 53,4 per cent. In the same report<sup>22</sup> an indication was given as to where treatment of eye conditions took place. At the hospital of the Elim Mission Station in Northern Transvaal facilities had been made available for eye cases. On the Witwatersrand additional facilities were brought into effect at the Baragwanath Hospital for Blacks. At the Kimberley hospital a part-time post of ophthalmologist was created by the Hospital Services of the Cape Province for the benefit of eye cases who had formerly been obliged to travel to Cape Town for treatment. One of the medical practitioners of the Jane Furse Mission Hospital in Sekukuniland had left for England to qualify as an ophthalmologist. The Palmer Hospital at Roodepoort had since its foundation (approximately five years earlier) already treated more than a thousand cases. Furthermore, societies for civilian blind came increasingly to the fore to make provision for prevention work as well as treatment of eye cases in their areas.

It is therefore evident that the National Council, as well as the State Departments concerned, became thoroughly aware of the urgent need to launch a campaign for the prevention of blindness and the treatment of eye diseases among the Black people of this country, especially with regard to trachoma.

It has already been stated that the Director in one of his reports referred to the acquisition of a mobile field unit by which means treatment facilities could be brought to the patients. In connection with this we read the following in the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 8 November 1948:

“The Acting Chairman, in thanking the Director for his report, stressed the importance of a Mobile Field Unit, for which urgent representations had been made to the Department of Health for



the provision of £7 500 (R15 000) to finance such a unit."

The representative of the Department of Native Affairs immediately reacted to this and strongly supported such a step.

At this stage we must return for a while to the organizational and administrative aspects of the Bureau.

It was stated earlier that an Advisory Bureau Committee had been appointed by the Executive Committee in November 1946, with the Director as convener. As the activities of the Bureau expanded the Executive Committee felt that the Committee should be enlarged to make it more representative. Six members would be elected by the Executive Committee and the Bureau Committee would be given the authority to co-opt a number of members. With the above in mind, the six members were elected at a meeting of the Executive committee held on 18 November 1948, and at its first meeting the Bureau Committee made its co-options. These consisted of ten honorary ophthalmologists, two representatives of State Departments, one of the National Council of Women of South Africa, and four other persons, among whom was Mr C. B. Anderson, a member of the Committee of the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind. The Rev. A. W. Blaxall was elected as chairman. The Committee therefore consisted of 24 members.

According to the tenth biennial report of the Council (1948-1949) the Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Blindness (as it was officially known) held twelve meetings during the previous two years, and concerned itself with the many aspects of the problem of prevention and conquest of blindness amongst all races in South Africa.

The next election of the Committee took place at the biennial meeting of the Council on 18-19 October 1950. The following persons were elected:

Mr C. B. Anderson

Dr M. Franks

Mr D. N. Murray

Miss A. M. Rogers

Mr W. Cohen.

At its first meeting held on 8 November 1950<sup>23</sup> the co-opted members were elected in the same way as in the case of the previous Committee.

A notable occurrence in connection with the Committee was the election of Mr C. B. Anderson as chairman. This can be considered the

beginning of a new era in the history of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. The fact that he has uninterruptedly acted as chairman up to the present, has over the past 30 years brought stability and continuity to the activities of the Bureau. His influence and stature in society has enhanced the prestige of the Bureau as well as that of the Council. In 1968 he was elected honorary life President of the National Council, an honour which he deserves by virtue of the outstanding services he has rendered for the advancement of the interests of the Council and the blind, in various fields. A more detailed account of his life and work will be given later.

In the meantime the Bureau continued with its surveys. The average number which could be conducted per annum was six. This was understandable since intensive preparations had to be made for each tour.

Before embarking on a tour Bantu Commissioners, District Surgeons, chiefs and others in authority had to be approached and also visited. The Director took the lead and was assisted by Black social workers and field officers of the Council. Arrangements had to be made for transport and accommodation for the ophthalmic surgeons, the nurses and the officers of the Council.

During the surveys which were conducted, treatment was often also given. If there was a hospital in the neighbourhood operations were performed there. The work, however, was often done under very difficult conditions. In his plea for acquiring a mobile unit, the Director writes in a report to the Executive Committee for the period September 1951 to February 1952 as follows:<sup>24</sup>

"The primitive conditions under which the work had to be completed in the open veld, under a scorching sun in an area where there are no clinics, calls for a mobile unit to work in, as no professional officer can do justice to his task nor can he be expected to endure such physical hardships. Only Dr . . . 's deep interest in the work compelled him to carry on with the work from early morning till late at night, also covering long distances by car between centres without any word of complaint. The Doctor also carried out a number of operations at the Mission Hospital<sup>25</sup> after the day's work."

In reports of the Director and the field officer not only the eye conditions of the inhabitants of the areas visited were recorded, but also interesting data of an ecological and social nature.<sup>26</sup> These included ob-

servations on matters such as agricultural conditions, the lack of water, the cultivability of the soil, the hygienic conditions of the people and even their daily diet. Matters such as superstition and the influence of the witch-doctor also received attention.

Because of the need evident from some of the above remarks, a great deal of educational work was done through the distribution of pamphlets and the giving of lectures by the Black field officer in the language of the people.

### The Mobile Unit

Although the mission hospitals in the areas where eye conditions were the worst were prepared to improve their facilities so that operations could be carried out by the ophthalmic surgeons in loco, the urgent need for a well equipped mobile eye unit was realised more and more. The Director, as instructed by the Bureau Committee, made inquiries, and in the first place a used field unit from the Department of Defence was considered,<sup>27</sup> but the idea was abandoned in view of the many problems which the conversion would entail. It was then decided to buy the chassis of a lorry upon which the unit could be built under the expert supervision of a committee of ophthalmologists. A Pretoria firm was commissioned, and it was a great day when the mobile eye unit of the Bureau was started on its mission by Mrs M. Malan, wife of the then Prime Minister, Dr D. F. Malan, from Church Square, Pretoria, on 16 October 1952.

With regard to the placing into service of the mobile field unit, the Director of the Bureau writes in the twelfth niennial report of the Council (1952-1954) as follows:<sup>28</sup>

“This is the first occasion that treatment facilities for eye diseases have been brought to the very door, as it were, of patients living in isolated areas. the unit is accompanied by an eye surgeon, two ophthalmic nurses (one European and one Non-European) and a Non-European social worker. As in all new ventures, there were initial difficulties in conducting the field service, but, with experience, they have been largely overcome. At first it was not realised that major operations could be carried out in the unit, and therefore the unit was not fully equipped for the work. But experience has shown that this can be done, and indeed excellent results have been obtained.”

Dr Esther Franks was requested by the chairman of the Bureau, Mr Colin Anderson, to accompany the mobile unit of its first tour as the oph-

thalmic surgeon. Sister J. Devis and Sister Priscilla Raborife accompanied her. The latter was obligingly provided from the Palmer Eye Hospital.<sup>29</sup> It was decided to visit the area of Schildpadfontein (approximately 130 kilometres north-west of Pretoria). The tour took place from 16 to 30 October 1952. According to the records the adjoining Black areas of Ramanchane and Kalkfontein were also included.

According to the records of the ophthalmic surgeon and Sister Devis the tour was a success. Of the 752 cases examined 512 received treatment, which included a number of minor operations. Dr Franks, in her report, stressed the fact that the value of a unit of this nature would be enhanced if the services of a full-time ophthalmologist could be obtained and a continuous service maintained.<sup>30</sup>

After it had become known that the mobile unit was in operation requests came from various quarters for visits to their areas. The Bureau was even approached by hospitals. A roster had thus to be drawn up. In doing so it had to be borne in mind that the mobile unit should also be made available to the other provinces and to all population groups.

In the twelfth biennial report of the Council (1952-1954) detailed information was supplied in connection with the ophthalmological services which had been rendered on the first six tours of the mobile unit. The areas were all situated in the Northern Transvaal, chiefly in Sekukuniland. Two hospitals were included, the first being one at the Philadelphia Mission Station at Dennilton (Groblersdal area) and the second at the Maandagshoek Mission Station (Sekukuniland). Only the total figures are given below:

Number of patients examined	8 955
Number with eye diseases	4 623
Number treated	3 924
Number of operations carried out	162

Furthermore it can be stated that of the 4 623 cases with eye diseases, there were 2 166 with a diagnosis of "trachoma and complications of trachoma", which means 40 per cent. Other eye diseases which were most common were conjunctivitis (1 018), cataract (220) and pterygium (201).

### **Full-time ophthalmologist**

As more tours were undertaken by the mobile unit, it became increasingly obvious that the services of a full-time ophthalmologist was an urgent necessity. The Bureau Committee therefore decided to make



a recommendation to the Executive Committee for the establishment of such a post, and nominated a sub-committee consisting of four ophthalmic surgeons to draw up a memorandum in connection with the matter.

The memorandum not only served as a motivation for the appointment of a full-time eye specialist, but also contained an informative review of the services which had thus far been rendered, where the difficulties had occurred, what facilities existed, and how these could be improved. Furthermore the role of the full-time ophthalmologist was outlined as against that of the part-time one.

In this connection the memorandum stated that in the case of the full-time eye specialist, it would be possible to establish a continuous service where there would be no interruptions and where the medical aftercare and follow-up work could be more effectively organised. In the case of the part-time ophthalmic surgeon it could happen that the latter might be urgently recalled to his practice while in the midst of an operation programme. Such a state of affairs could leave a number of frustrated and disappointed patients behind. For this reason no long-term programme could be planned. With regard to the effective and continuous use of the mobile unit, the memorandum states the following:

“Some diseases, like trachoma, require longer treatment to be effectively cured. If the unit can remain in an area for the required length of time, not only can it clear a whole area of trachoma, but can eliminate a potential reservoir of infection to other areas.”

Besides all the advantages mentioned in the memorandum with regard to the appointment of a full-time eye specialist, it affects another matter which is closely connected with the entire question of a suitable programme for the prevention of blindness. It is namely the serious situation which arose after the Department of Health had withdrawn its subsidies for surveys, although the Department was prepared to subsidise the costs connected with the mobile unit. In the event of the surveys having to be suspended owing to the lack of funds, it would leave a serious gap with regard to information concerning the prevailing eye diseases, especially in areas which had not yet been visited. It was ascertained that even in the areas where surveys had been conducted and treatment administered, there were still cases needing treatment. This was proved by admissions from those areas to the Palmer Eye Hospital. As an annexure to the memorandum a list of 22

areas was attached where treatment was required for a total of 8 581 cases.

An important advantage which the appointment of a full-time ophthalmologist would bring would be the drawing up of a programme for the education of the general public by means of lectures, the production and showing of films, the distribution of pamphlets, and so forth. For the part-time eye specialist it would be impossible to find the time for this.

The memorandum concludes with an exposition of the costs attached to the management of such a full-time ophthalmological service.

The memorandum was submitted to the Executive Committee at a meeting held 24-25 March 1953, and a twofold resolution was adopted: firstly, that the appointment of a full-time ophthalmologist be approved in principle, subject to the subsidisation of such a post by the Department of Health, and secondly, that the Bureau Committee approach the St. John Ophthalmic Hospital authorities to ascertain whether a full-time ophthalmic surgeon could be appointed jointly by the Bureau and the St. John Hospital.

The question of the joint appointment of an ophthalmic surgeon by the St. John Hospital and the Bureau was discussed at a meeting of the Bureau Committee held on 23 April 1953. The unanimous opinion was that it would not serve any good purpose, and that the idea should be abandoned. It was also resolved to continue with representations to the Department of Health for the subsidisation of the post of eye specialist.<sup>31</sup>

After lengthy negotiations the Department of health agreed to subsidise 87,5 per cent of the costs connected with the mobile unit, up to a fixed ceiling. This could include the salary of the full-time ophthalmologist. By virtue of this, the Executive Committee granted the Bureau permission to continue with the appointment of a full-time ophthalmic surgeon.

The post was advertised in local and British medical journals, among others in the British Journal of Ophthalmology, London, England. The closing date was 15 March 1955. Three applications were received, but the sub-committee which had been appointed to study the applications recommended that no appointment be made.

After this Dr H. W. Harris, ophthalmic surgeon of the Jane Furse Memorial Hospital, a mission hospital in the Northern Transvaal, inti-

mated that he was prepared to accept the post. In view of the fact that Dr Harris was well-known for the excellent work he had done, he was considered to be a satisfactory applicant and was appointed to the post.<sup>32</sup> He assumed duty on 3 January 1956, almost three years after the appointment of a full-time eye surgeon had been approved. Dr Harris, however, occupied the post for only seven months and left the service of the Council on 31 July 1956.

The events which followed indicate that a full-time ophthalmic service never really got under way. Great pains were taken to obtain suitable applicants, but after they had accepted the post and were apparently well settled, they resigned. All had come from overseas. The situation worsened to such an extent that in the past eight years there has been no full-time eye surgeon on the staff of the Bureau.

After Dr Harris' departure the post was again advertised, but no applications were received. In desperation it was then decided to approach Mr (later Sir) John Wilson, Director of the British Commonwealth Society for the Blind in London, for advice with regard to the advertising of the post in other parts of the British Commonwealth.<sup>33</sup> In spite of this the reaction to the advertisements was disappointing.

At this stage the opinion was expressed that the salary for such an important post was inadequate, and that this might possibly have been the reason why so few applicants had come forward. After the Executive Committee had approved a better salary and increased subsidies, the post was once more advertised. An application was received from Dr T. Hildebrand of Germany. After a proper inquiry had been made, he was appointed.<sup>34</sup>

A problem arose, however, with regard to his registration with the S.A. Medical and Dental Council to practise as a doctor in South Africa. Discussions then took place with the South African Institute for Medical Research, Johannesburg, with the result that Dr Hildebrand was registered via this body on the understanding that he worked as an eye specialist for the Bureau only.<sup>35</sup> His registration came into effect from 11 February 1969, and on that day he assumed duty with the Bureau.

Dr Hildebrand remained for seven months only, and after the termination of his service on 30 November 1960, he returned to Germany.<sup>36</sup>

The post was again advertised and Dr P. D. Scheffel, also from

Germany, was appointed. He assumed duty on 11 December 1960.<sup>37</sup> As in the case of his predecessor, he had to be satisfied with restrictive registration. According to reports he did good work in the field of the prevention of blindness, and applied himself especially to the study of trachoma.

As part of his duties he was appointed in a counselling capacity with the S.A. Institute for Medical Research in connection with the research project on trachoma which was being conducted at the time. It was initiated by Dr J. Graham Scott<sup>38</sup> who was in charge of the project for mass treatment of trachoma in the Northern Transvaal. Regret was expressed by the Bureau when Dr Scheffel resigned at the beginning of 1963, to accept a position at the World Health Organisation (W.H.O.).

The following full-time ophthalmic surgeon to be appointed was Dr R. Schoyerer. He also came from Germany originally, and was practising in Ghana when he applied for the post. Since it was essential for him to be registered as a medical practitioner, the University of the Witwatersrand appointed him on their staff, and seconded him to the Bureau.<sup>39</sup> He assumed duty on 5 April 1965.<sup>40</sup>

Dr Schoyerer remained with the Bureau for less than a year, and terminated his service at the end of March 1966.

Following this four years elapsed before the next appointment was made.

At a meeting of the Bureau Committee held on 1 September 1969, a letter was read from Dr M. N. Fournier of Tripoli in which she applied for the post of ophthalmologist. She was Dutch. The Bureau was satisfied with her application, but since a personal interview was impossible, she was appointed provisionally for a period of six months. At the end of the period it was expected of her to sign a contract for a further term of office of eighteen months. She assumed duty on 28 January 1970,<sup>41</sup> but left the service of the Bureau after eight months, on 9 October 1970.<sup>42</sup> She then accepted a post at the University of the Witwatersrand as a registrar in the ophthalmological department. She continued to serve the Bureau in an honorary capacity, and accompanied the mobile unit on several occasions.

The post was advertised three times after that, and two applications were received, one from Canada and the other from Istanbul. No appointment was made.<sup>43</sup>

After this no further attempts were made to obtain the services of a full-time ophthalmologist for the Bureau.



In spite of this state of affairs the Bureau went from strength to strength with its essential task of preventing blindness and restoring sight, both in this country and in some of our neighbouring states. For this important work the Bureau, in course of time, received international recognition from several sources. In this connection we can refer to the appointment of Mr Wentworth as a member of the Committee for the Prevention of Blindness of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind at its conference held in 1964 in New York. More recent proof of the deep appreciation which our Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness enjoys internationally is to be found in a letter which the Director of the National Council (Mr William Rowland) received in 1977 from Sir John Wilson,<sup>44</sup> President of the International Agency for the prevention of Blindness. The letter dealt with South Africa's status at the forthcoming international congress for the prevention of blindness which was to be held at Oxford from 6-8 July 1978. After Sir John had expressed his pleasure at the National Council's decision to participate in the Conference he explained the procedure with regard to the credentials of each National Committee in the world. In this connection he writes:

"National Committees or Commissions have, in fact, been formed in the past three years in more than 40 countries. Very few of them are as well established as yours and, as you will imagine, the problem of sorting out their credentials is somewhat complex . . . Knowing of the work and composition of your Prevention of Blindness Bureau, I have no hesitation in recommending to the Credentials Committee that it should be recognised as the National Committee for South Africa."

He concluded this part of his letter as follows:

"We certainly hope that South Africa can be fully represented as you have an outstanding story to tell."

The success of the Bureau in the prevention of eye diseases, especially trachoma, is due to the expertise, efficiency and dedication to duty of the great number of ophthalmologists of our country who are prepared to collaborate with the central administration of the Bureau so that the preventive work can be carried out in an organised manner. The basis for this systematic approach by the ever growing group of professional men was laid by the first Director of the Bureau, Mr S. K. Wentworth. The efficiency with which he had organised the mobile unit from its inception was continued

by his successors. This tradition of reliable and capable organization is still maintained at the present day.

### Extensive tours

We have heretofore only touched upon the first six tours of the mobile unit after it had been launched in October 1952. These tours were the forerunners of numerous others which were undertaken in different parts of the country and also in our neighbouring states. At the time of writing, at the beginning of 1979, tour number 262 has been completed.

The accepted procedure is that a comprehensive report of each tour is submitted, which firstly includes data with regard to the patients who have been operatively or otherwise treated. Then the statistics relating to the various eye diseases which have been found are tabulated. Following this the field officer gives an account of other aspects of the tour, such as its organization, aid from state departments, co-operation with mission hospitals and the general social and financial position of the population. All this indicates that the reports cover a wide spectrum of the weal and woe in the lives of the population groups.

A cursory glance at the numerous data which are included in the tables and records of the various tours shows firstly that an exceptionally wide geographical field was covered. During the first decade of the existence of the mobile unit the Northern Transvaal was given preference in view of the high incidence of trachoma in that area. During 1960-1962 tours were also conducted in other parts of the Transvaal, such as Komatipoort, Lichtenburg and Soekmekaar. Visits were paid to Mafeking (twice) and Sterkspruit in the Cape Province, Ladysmith in Natal and Transkei.<sup>45</sup>

Following this, considerable attention was given to the Free State and Northern Cape. During the period 1962-1964, amongst other places, Vryburg and Kuruman as well as Thaba 'Nchu were visited. In the ensuing period (1964-1966) North and North East Free State, Welkom, Virginia, Bloemfontein and Theunissen received visits. During 1966 to 1970 wide-spread areas were attended to, such as Randfontein, Kimberley, Ciskei, Grahamstown, Witsieshoek in the Qwa-Qwa homeland, Chatsworth, an Indian area near Durban, and the southern areas of South West Africa. In the meantime the unit continually returned to the Northern Transvaal where some of the badly affected areas were visited up to three times.

From 1974 onwards South West Africa received an appreciable number of visits. Two tours were conducted to Ovamboland and in

July 1975 Rehoboth, Walvis Bay, Usakos and Swakopmund were also included. A comprehensive survey of the eye conditions among the Bushmen of South West Africa had been conducted prior to that.

As a result of the increasing demands being made on the mobile unit and the extensiveness of the area in which it operated, the Bureau Committee came to the conclusion that a second mobile unit, accompanied by a second ophthalmic team, should be placed in the field. In connection with this the chairman of the Bureau reported to the 23rd biennial meeting of the Council, held in October 1976, as follows:

"At the time of the 22nd Conference plans were being discussed for the establishment of a second Bureau team, and provisional cost calculations were laid before the Conference. Now two years later I wish to report that a handsome contribution of R20 000 by the St. John Ophthalmic Foundation has made possible the purchase of all the equipment for the second unit. In recognition of this splendid gesture, this unit will be known as the 'St. John Eye Unit'. Staff to man the unit have been appointed, and the first tour has been organised to cover the Swellendam/Barrydale areas during May 1976. The establishment of the second unit carries the blessing of the Department of Health, who have agreed to subsidise its activities to the extent of seven-eighths up to R40 000 per annum. With the second unit in operation, the possibility of doubling the operations of the Bureau would become a reality which should stand particularly the Coloured and Indian communities in good stead, as the second unit will probably devote most of its time to them."<sup>46</sup>

As a result of this arrangement many towns and districts in the South and South-Western Cape as well as in the Middle and Eastern Karoo were visited. Besides Swellendam and Barrydale, which have already been mentioned, the following names appear in the records: De Aar, Prieska, Middelburg (Cape), Colesburg, Steynsburg, Hofmeyr, Graaff-Reinet, Somerset East, Jansenville, Murraysburg, Aberdeen, Beaufort West and Bredasdorp. The work on these tours was chiefly done among the Coloured people.

With regard to the Indians, we find that tours were conducted by the St. John unit at Stanger, Lenasia (schools) and Tongaat. A feature of the work among the Indians in Natal is the conducting of day clinics in various country towns. Indian ophthalmologists take turns to do the work. Furthermore it can be stated that an Indian nurse has been ap-



pointed to assist the eye specialists at the day clinics and to do the follow-up work. She also makes arrangements for the ophthalmic treatment in hospitals of Indian patients whom she discovers in the country districts.

In later years the function of the mobile unit changed in some ways. As more hospitals and clinics were established in outlying areas, and as existing hospitals became better equipped, eye patients were admitted to these institutions for treatment. The operations were usually performed by honorary ophthalmologists of the Bureau, who at the same time made use of the opportunity to impart some of their knowledge to the staff of such a hospital by means of lectures, talks and the showing of slides. Over the years a very good understanding was built up between the Bureau and the Mission hospitals. In this connection we quote the following from the 22nd report (1972-1974) of the Council:

"Where previously it was necessary, because of lack of adequate specialised hospital facilities, to send the Bureau's mobile theatre to numerous Bantu areas, it is now, with the advent of more Mission hospitals, only necessary to send the Bureau team to those hospitals which provide all the facilities required. The mobile theatre is only used in outlying areas not yet served by Mission hospitals."<sup>47</sup>

The detailed records of the eye specialists and field officers of the more than 260 tours of the mobile units include an astonishing amount of statistical data. When studying these statistics one is initially struck by the immensity of the task which the Bureau has undertaken over the past thirty-three years. Furthermore, by way of comparison, the records provide conclusive proof that there has been a considerable decrease in the incidence of certain eye diseases, especially those caused by infection. Moreover, it can also be deduced from the records that numerous persons have regained their sight as a result of operative treatment such as, for example, the removal of cataracts.

Whereas the reports of the ophthalmologists are written in a more professional vein, the field officers give, among other things, a survey of the organizational aspects of the tours and the circumstances under which the work was done. In their reports we read of long, fatiguing motor journeys along practically impassable roads, through swollen rivers and uninhabitable bush regions; of long queues of people at field clinics; of examinations, treatment, and operations from early morning until late at night, even over weekends. We read of a nurse at-



tached to the unit who became infected with trachoma, fortunately without any detrimental results. However, we also read about the joy of people whose physical suffering was alleviated, or whose vision was partially or fully restored after years of blindness.

### **Mass Trachoma Campaign**

Owing to the excessively high incidence of trachoma which was found among Black children in certain areas of the Northern Transvaal the Bureau decided to launch an intensive trachoma treatment project. The teachers of approximately 150 Black schools were to be asked to assist in the scheme. They were to receive careful instructions in connection with the application at fixed times of an antibiotic ointment to the eyes of their young pupils.

The campaign was initiated in 1955 by Dr J. Graham Scott and Dr I. B. Taylor, and after the departure of Dr Taylor it was continued by Dr Scott. The latter supervised the professional aspect, namely the prescription of the ointment, the times of application, and the quantities. He also studied the results meticulously. For a more explicit description of the extent of the project, and the results obtained, we quote the following passage from the fifteenth biennial report of the Council (1958-1960):

“The method of mass treatment in the field was initiated and supervised by two members of the Bureau committee, Dr J. Graham Scott and Dr I. B. Taylor, and their experiments showed obvious success, in fact, one might say dramatic success. The experiment was confined to babies and school children, and it showed that the incidence of trachoma can be reduced over a three year period to negligible proportions by the use of 1% chloramphenicol ointment three times daily for three days in each month during the summer. The treatment of babies during that period showed a drop (in the disease) from 63% to 17%, but unfortunately when treatment ceased, the incidence reverted to the original figure in babies but not in school children. Re-infection occurred among the babies but not among the school children – so it is advised that mass treatment be confined to schools and that Bantu field workers advise mothers how to treat their babies.”<sup>48</sup>

The project assumed such large proportions that a field officer of the Bureau was permanently assigned the task of supervising it. Later on some of the Black social workers were also called in to assist with the

project. In the nineteenth biennial report of the Council (1966-1968) it was stated that at that stage already 48 000 Black pupils from 120 schools had received treatment. In the same report it was also stated that the then Department of Bantu Education had agreed to the conducting of a trachoma survey in the urban Black schools of the Southern Transvaal area. This announcement was welcomed by the Bureau.

According to the reports there is indisputable proof that the intensive treatment which had been given, had drastically reduced the incidence of trachoma. In the 23rd biennial report of the council (1974-1976) it was stated that trachoma amongst school children in the Potgietersrust/Pietersburg area had been reduced to 5 per cent.<sup>49</sup> In July 1974 the trachoma team moved from the Potgietersrust/Pietersburg area to Elim and Tshilidzini,<sup>50</sup> where the infection was found to be 49,2 per cent and 42,5 per cent respectively among the school children who had been examined. With regard to this matter, the 23rd biennial report states the following:

"The Department of Health introduced a health training programme as a follow-up to medical treatment of trachoma to combat infection, and resultant figures after a year showed the rate of infection had dropped to between 12% and 18% ... Through the medium of the schools, the forming of local committees was encouraged to ensure, as far as possible, continuation of work started with."<sup>51</sup>

The campaign against trachoma is conducted by the Bureau in collaboration with the Department of Health.

## Research

As a result of the high incidence of trachoma in the northern areas of the country the Bureau decided to request the S.A. Institute for Medical Research in Johannesburg to do research in connection with the disease. The objective was firstly to isolate the trachoma virus and after that to develop a vaccine which could be applied to cure the disease, or if possible, to eradicate it completely.

At a meeting of the Bureau Committee held on 21 June 1956 the Director reported that the Board of Trustees of the Institute had approved such a research project. It would be placed under the personal supervision of Dr J. Gear, head of the Institute. The National Council granted a sum of £1 000 (R2 000) for this purpose.

With regard to the isolation of the trachoma virus, Dr W. Cohen,

acting chairman of the National Council, writes as follows in the sixteenth biennial report of the Council (1960-1962):

"Considering that our resources are distinctly limited, it is gratifying to record the progress made in South Africa with research into the eye disease which causes more ravages than any other in the world, viz. trachoma. We hold the distinction of being one of the three countries which succeeded in isolating the trachoma virus. We have conducted experiments which have enjoyed international acclaim. An eminent ophthalmologist who serves on the Bureau Committee has been able to tell of our work at international conferences on trachoma and to point to the leading role played by South Africa in this study."

The next step in the research programme was the development of a vaccine to combat the trachoma virus. In order to obtain this, tests had to be carried out on the eyes of humans. The procedure would be to infect them with trachoma and then by applying the vaccine, to ascertain whether healing could be effected. The Bureau advertised for volunteers and 25 persons came forward. Finally three were used in the experiment, one sighted and two blind persons. Everywhere expectations were high that we were on the threshold of a great break-through with regard to the eradication of the dreaded trachoma,<sup>52</sup> but unfortunately this was not realised. In this connection the chairman of the Bureau Committee reported as follows in the nineteenth biennial report of the Council (1966-1968):

"Research continues into the manufacture of a preventive vaccine at the virus laboratories of the S.A. Institute for Medical Research. Results have unfortunately not fulfilled early encouraging results and modifications in the strength of the vaccine are now being made. It is hoped that this pioneering work will produce results in due course." (Page 36).

This was the situation at the end of the year 1968. Two years later, however, in the twentieth biennial report (1968-1970), we are informed by the chairman that:

"Unfortunately the vaccine to prevent trachoma had proved to be disappointing and it was decided that it was not worthwhile pursuing this aspect of the work, but that it could be accepted that the treatment with antibiotics had at least had the effect of curbing trachoma." (Page 48).

It may be of interest to conclude this part of the Bureau's history

which deals with the activities of the mobile unit with a passage from an interview which Mr S. K. Wentworth had with the S.A. Digest in 1972. It appeared in the form of an article in *Imfama* in February 1972 under the caption: *New Light in the Homelands*:

"But we had a lot of prejudice to overcome in the remote areas before the blind would readily present themselves for treatment. There was the case of the sightless witchdoctor who paid a surreptitious visit to the mobile unit. He told us he wanted to be operated on in secret so his 'patients' would never suspect that he had lost faith in his own *muti* (medicine). The operation was a complete success, and the tribe soon realised what had happened. Almost immediately we were inundated by a flood of patients. In this way the Bantu gained implicit faith in the ability of our own 'medicine men' to restore the sight of the blind."

Answering a question on the number of persons who had regained their sight, Mr Wentworth replied as follows:

"Since the mobile unit was launched in October 1952 we've performed 11 790 successful major eye operations on Bantu patients. Of these 8 402 had cataracts in both eyes and were therefore blind. Every single one of these can now see again. Of the remainder who suffered from other eye ailments, many of them got their sight back."

Such were the circumstances in 1972, after the mobile unit had been in the field for twenty years.

### **Industrial ophthalmology**

Shortly after the establishment of the Bureau in 1946 the then Director, Mr S. K. Wentworth, campaigned for measures for the protection of the eyes of factory workers. He regularly exhibited safety devices at shows, such as various types of spectacles and eye shields. Posters were displayed to warn against eye accidents in factories. The question of lighting in factories, for instance on work-benches and assembly lines, also received attention. In connection with the protection of the eyes in industry, we quote the following from a report by the Director of the Bureau, dated 16 September 1947<sup>53</sup>:

"The Department of Labour has been most helpful and co-operative and arrangements have been worked out whereunder the Director can attend as many eye accidents inquiries as his duties will permit. Firms are also informed that they can obtain propa-



ganda posters from the Bureau and that the director, whenever possible, will make himself available for organised lectures for the benefit of workmen and managements on the subject of eye hazards in Industry."

Full particulars of eye accidents sustained in factories, as recorded by the Workmen's Compensation Commissioner, are recounted in the above report.<sup>54</sup>

As time went on the question of safeguarding the eyesight of factory workers increasingly required the attention of the Bureau, so that it was decided to recommend to the Executive Committee that a conference on industrial ophthalmology be convened. The necessary funds were approved and the conference took place in Johannesburg from 10 to 12 November 1958.

The published report on the conference with the title: *Proceedings of the First Conference on Industrial Ophthalmology*, appeared in 1960. The theme of the conference was: "Prevention of eye accidents," but a much wider field was covered, inasmuch as factory lighting, street lighting, colour vision, colours in industry, and the rehabilitation of the newly blinded worker were dealt with. Nevertheless, the majority of the addresses, and the discussions which followed, had a bearing on the causes of eye injuries in the factory situation and how these could be avoided. Examples of subjects were: *Eye Injuries in Industry*, *Toxic and Chemical Injuries of the Eyes*, *Burns of the Eyes and their Modern Treatment*, *Radiation Effects on the Eyes in Industry*. Therefore it is clear that the addresses had a direct bearing on what could be expected in practice. An address was also delivered on *Eyesight and the Ageing Worker*, in which stress was laid on the importance of regular eye tests for ageing workers and the correct spectacles.

An important aspect of the conference was the attendance of two eminent ophthalmologists from abroad, who had been invited to deliver addresses. One was Dr Ralph Ryan, M. D. of Morgantown, West Virginia, U.S.A., and the other was Dr B. W. Rycroft, O.B.E., F.R.C.S. of the Corneo-Plastic Unit, East Grinstead, England. The opening address was delivered by Senator J. de Klerk, Minister of Labour.

Although the conference took place twenty years ago, the content of the report is still of value at the present day. It is interesting that in the report mention was made of the *first* conference, as if further similar conferences would be held. Up to the present, however, this has not materialised, and the conference in question was the only one held.

## Corneal Grafting

In the case of certain eye conditions, corneal grafting is an effective operative method for the recovery of sight. The operation is being successfully performed in South Africa. For such an operation cadaver material must be obtained, which involves certain legal implications. Thus the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness shortly after its establishment devoted its attention "to the question of amending the Anatomy Act of 1911, in order to ensure that sufficient material is available to eye surgeons for performing corneal grafting".<sup>55</sup> The result was that, in collaboration with the Ophthalmological Society of South Africa, the Bureau succeeded in having the Post Mortems and Removal of Human Tissues Act, 1952 (Act No. 30 of 1952) passed by Parliament.

The first reference to corneal grafting and the acquirements of cadaver material is found in the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 6 and 7 October 1949. The relevant item in the minutes reads as follows:

"It was agreed to meet the request of the Ophthalmological Society<sup>56</sup> and to take steps to have the law amended to remove the serious medico-legal difficulties which stand in the way of obtaining corneal graft material from cadaver." (Page 13).

This resolution resulted from the Bureau's report which had been submitted to the meeting of the Executive Committee.

After the passing of the Act, the next step was to find corneal material, for which donors were necessary. Propaganda pamphlets are distributed from the Bureau office, and a form was drafted by a committee of ophthalmologists to be completed by prospective eye donors. Initially permission was granted to place the pamphlets in the Johannesburg General Hospital. Later other hospitals also received the pamphlets, which were likewise sent to all eye specialists in the country.

It was realised that the establishment of an eye bank was essential, but before this could materialise the Bureau office in Pretoria and the Cape Regional Office undertook the administrative aspect of the organization. On the one hand contacts were made with hospitals, and on the other with the ophthalmologists, so as to ensure that the material reached its destination in time.

The first eye bank was established in Port Elizabeth in 1962, with a legacy which had to be used specifically for this purpose. Later eye

banks were established in all large centres where corneal graft operations were performed.

### Human Genetics

In its endeavour to promote all aspects of the prevention of blindness the Bureau Committee in 1963 decided to request the National Bureau for Educational and Social Research<sup>57</sup> to conduct an in-depth investigation into the heredity factors which have a bearing on the causes of blindness.

The request was granted, and Dr J. Op't Hof, 'n prominent geneticist, was commissioned to conduct the investigation.<sup>58</sup>

An Advisory Committee consisting of nine members was appointed, among whom were the Director of the National Bureau for Educational and Social Research, Dr P. M. Robbertse, who presided as chairman, Professor M. H. Luntz of the Department of Ophthalmology of the University of the Witwatersrand, Dr H. Meyer of the Department of Ophthalmology of the University of Pretoria, Professor J. D. J. Hofmeyr of the Department of Genetics of the University of Pretoria and representatives of the Departments of Health and Social Welfare and of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

In the report<sup>59</sup> which appeared after the work had been completed, it was stated that the investigation was conducted mainly at the School for the Blind, Worcester. Available data with regard to the eye conditions of all the pupils who had attended the school since its inception in 1881 to 1965, were examined. The number was 1 386. To these were added 31 adult persons who had not been pupils of the school. The sample therefore consisted of 1 417 persons.

In the introduction the compiler reports the following:

"This survey is the first of its kind in the Republic of South Africa and conclusive information has come to light, indicating the importance and necessity of further research and procedures to combat blindness and impaired vision."

He ends the introduction to the report with the following remarks:

"This report does not provide an answer to the problem of hereditary blindness but delineates the direction and importance of the necessary research to attain a further step in reaching this aim."

The main sources of information for the researcher were the files which are kept for each child at the school. In addition interviews were

conducted with the staff of the school, the pupils who were at school at the time, and ex-pupils in the old age homes and workshops for the blind at Worcester, as well as with parents and relatives who were living in fifteen surrounding towns.

The researcher had to cope with numerous problems in connection with the tracing of data on the eye conditions of the pupils, and especially on the family relationships between parents, grandparents and forebears, which was necessary for establishing family pedigrees.

He found, for example, that no records of pupils had been kept before 1920. In this connection the report states:

"Virtually no information concerning the relatives of the pupils was on record at the School for the Blind. However, by means of personal interviews, a total of 100 family pedigrees could be compiled."<sup>60</sup>

In the first place the report supplied accurate statistics of the eye conditions of all the pupils of whom the data were available. The analyses of the deductions, which in some cases were of a highly technical nature, followed. In this connection the compiler states the following:

"In most cases a recessive mode of inheritance was the cause of defective sight. Dominant modes of inheritance could be possible in two cases. In addition to these modes of inheritance others with a variable measure of penetrance and expressivity were encountered."<sup>61</sup>

Following upon this he gives in table 3.5 data in connection with the causes of blindness which are linked to diseases, and his finding concerning this was as follows:

"The most outstanding features in Table 3.5 are that genetic origin of eye conditions was established in 26,04 per cent of the group investigated and in 18,21 per cent of the cases genetic origin was possible."<sup>62</sup>

Dr Op't Hof concluded his report with the measures which could be applied for the prevention of blindness, and in this connection only paragraph 5.2.3. (d) is quoted:

"The detection of heterozygotes or carriers of different eye conditions is a most important factor in aiding genetic counselling."<sup>63</sup>

This genetic counselling which the investigator mentions in his report is of importance, especially in the case of prospective marriages.



Consequently the entire question of hereditary blindness must also be seen from a social viewpoint.

### **Administrative**

It is understandable that the administrative and organizational aspects of the Bureau's activities are of the utmost importance for its successful functioning. As regards this facet of the work, everything revolves round the chief officer.<sup>64</sup> The Bureau was in general very successful with its appointments in this respect.

We have previously indicated that the first officer of the Bureau to be appointed was Mr S. K. Wentworth, who laid the foundation for its success. Apart from his organising ability he was able to associate easily with senior state officials and in this way received considerable financial aid on behalf of the Bureau. When he was promoted to Organising Secretary of the National Council in 1961, after the resignation of Mr D. J. van Wyk, Mr L. N. F. Pretorius, who was then already in the Council's employ, was appointed in his place. He was likewise an efficient organiser who followed up the work of his predecessor with enthusiasm.

When Mr Pretorius left the service of the Council in 1964, he was succeeded by Mr N. A. Gaum. Less than a year later he was promoted to Deputy Director of the Council and Advocate B. C. Mullan was appointed in his place. He assumed office on 1 December 1965 and was succeeded by Mr R. Francis on 1 July 1968. After two years of service the latter resigned on 31 May 1970. Mr P. D. Malan was then appointed on 15 June 1970, but after only a few months he left the service of the Bureau. He was succeeded by Mr R. C. Olls who assumed office on 1 June 1971.

During Mr Olls' period of service, the post of Bureau Administrative Officer was regarded to that of Assistant Director (Bureau) of the Council by reason of the important position which the Bureau occupied in the activities of the Council. Mr Olls was devoted to his work, and had outstanding organizational ability.

He served the Bureau's cause convincingly on various occasions during deputations to provincial and state authorities. When he resigned from the service of the Bureau on 30 October 1976, he was succeeded by Mr S. J. van der Walt. The latter assumed office on 1 November 1976 as the officer-in-chief of the Bureau and Assistant Director (Bureau) of the Council, and still occupies that position. At pre-

sent he is upholding the tradition of dedication and enthusiasm which characterised the former officers-in-chief of the Bureau since its establishment in 1946.

Mr Van der Walt had worked with Mr Olls for approximately 1½ years as his field officer, and had therefore gained valuable experience. Perhaps the following remark by Professor D. Sevel, head of the Department of Ophthalmology of the University of Cape Town, may be quoted here:

"The success of this trip (to Upington and environs) was due to the organizational ability of Mr Olls and Mr Van der Walt. Their enthusiasm and sincerity was remarkably good."<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

It is impossible to do justice in this brief survey to the important task which the Bureau has performed during the past thirty-three years. Quite apart from the happiness it has brought into the lives of innumerable people, two achievements remain outstanding. In the first instance the Bureau, through its honorary ophthalmologists, contributed in a high degree to the acquisition and development of ophthalmological knowledge. Secondly, the Bureau was of great financial value to the country for it restored the sight of so many of its citizens who would otherwise have been a financial burden on the State.

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Council Meeting held 20 March 1929, page 21, also recorded in the first biennial report (1929-1930) page 12.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs Horwood represented the Child Welfare Society of S.A. on the National Council.

<sup>3</sup> First minute book, page 179.

<sup>4</sup> Mr Kirstein was a blind physiotherapist, trained at St Dunstan's and a representative of the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps then 22 June 1939 should be regarded as the inauguration date of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. Yet few of its objectives and activities became realised during the war years (1939-1945). Therefore a fresh start to re-establish the Bureau was made near the end of the war in 1944. The inauguration date is generally given as 16 January 1946, the date when the first director of the Bureau reported for duty.

<sup>6</sup> The minutes of this meeting are no longer available, but in the sixth biennial report of the Council (1939-1940) a fairly complete account was given of the resolutions adopted by the meeting and the documentation in connection with them (page 20-21). It can also be assumed that the Department received its name at that meeting, namely the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.

<sup>7</sup> Sixth biennial meeting of the Council, page 20.

<sup>8</sup> Seventh biennial report of the Council (1941-1943), page 8.

<sup>9</sup> Seventh biennial report, page 9.

<sup>10</sup> Annexure to the minutes of the seventh biennial meeting of the Council, held 17-18 October 1944, pages 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> Dr P. Boshoff is a well-known ophthalmic surgeon in Johannesburg. He was one of the representatives of the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind. He was the first ophthalmic surgeon to attend a meeting of the National Council.

<sup>12</sup> Ezenzeleni, near Roodepoort, Transvaal, is the name of the place where the institution of the

- Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind was situated at the time of its establishment in 1937, and several years after. Later it was moved to Ga-Rankuwa.
- 15 The name varied from Palmer Hostel to Palmer Hospital, Palmer Eye Hospital, and even Palmer Preventorium. (See Minutes of meeting of Executive Committee, 25 February 1948).
  - 14 *The Battle for Light* by A. W. Blaxall, page 9.
  - 15 The St John's Eye Hospital was opened near Johannesburg in 1951.
  - 16 December 1946.
  - 17 Submitted to the meeting of the Executive Committee held 5-9 November 1946.
  - 18 The list of names of the ophthalmic surgeons appears as an annexure to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held 5 November 1945. They were from Cape Town (2), Durban (2), East London (1), Johannesburg (3), Pietermaritzburg (1), Port Elizabeth (1), Pretoria (2).
  - 19 Ninth biennial report of the Council (1946-1947), page 41.
  - 20 Trachoma is a disease which originates in the conjunctiva of the eye and can develop further. It is caused by a virus which is often transmitted by flies. Therefore it flourishes in unhygienic conditions. There are four stages of the disease, and it can lead to total blindness. Trachoma is also known as Egyptian disease, for it has been alleged that it spread from Egypt throughout Africa.
  - 21 Ninth biennial report of the National Council (1946-1947) page 41.
  - 22 Tenth biennial report of the Council (1948-1949), page 18.
  - 23 This meeting was recorded in the minutes as the 24th, and the Committee was then still known as "an advisory committee". From the 25th meeting "advisory" was omitted and it was then called the Committee for the Prevention of Blindness. The present name is: "Committee of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness".
  - 24 Meeting of Executive Committee held on 25-26 March 1952.
  - 25 Maandagshoek Mission Hospital in Sekukuniland, Northern Transvaal.
  - 26 An example of this is Survey Number 17. Report dated 28 February 1952.
  - 27 The Director's progress report submitted to the meeting of the Bureau Committee on 22 March 1951.
  - 28 Twelfth biennial report of the Council (1952-1954), pages 18-19.
  - 29 In the minutes of the meeting of the Bureau Committee held 24 November 1952, we read the following: "It was further decided that the Palmer hostel be again approached and asked for the services of Bantu nurse Priscilla Raborife for the proposed trip and that a letter of appreciation be written to the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind for the very excellent services rendered by this nurse during the first trip of the unit".
  - 30 Minutes of a special meeting of the Bureau Committee, held 24 November 1952. (The question of a full-time ophthalmologist in the service of Council was to receive attention later.)
  - 31 Minutes of a meeting of the Committee of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, held 28 April 1953, page 4.
  - 32 Minutes of meeting of Bureau Committee held 22 December 1955.
  - 33 Minutes of meeting of the Bureau Committee held 15 November 1956, page 5.
  - 34 Minutes of Bureau Committee of 10 December 1959.
  - 35 Minutes of Bureau meeting of 3 March 1960.
  - 36 Minutes of Bureau meeting of 18 August 1960.
  - 37 Minutes of Bureau meeting of 16 February 1961.
  - 38 Dr Graham Scott is a member of the Bureau Committee and also of the "W.H.O. Expert Advisory Panel on Trachoma."
  - 39 Minutes of Bureau Committee meeting of 21 January 1965.
  - 40 Minutes of Bureau Committee meeting of 29 April 1965.
  - 41 Minutes of meeting of Bureau Committee held 12 March 1970.
  - 42 Agenda of Bureau Committee meeting of 15 October 1970, page 7.
  - 43 Agenda and minutes of meeting of the Bureau Committee held 25 February 1971.
  - 44 Sir John Wilson is the blind General Secretary of the British Commonwealth Society for the Blind. He is also the President of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, an organization which was established at the Conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind in 1974 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Sir John has many contacts in south Africa, has already visited this country, and is well acquainted with our work here.
  - 45 According to tables included in the 16th biennial report of the Council (1960-1962).
  - 46 Twenty-third Biennial Report of the Council, page 29.
  - 47 Twenty-second biennial report of the National Council (1972-1974), page 39.
  - 48 Fifteenth biennial report of the National Council (1958-1960), page 14.
  - 49 It had receded from 35.4% to 5%. See *Imfama* Vol. VII, No. 1, December 1967, page 3: *The Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness celebrates its coming of age*, by H. A. Gaum.

- <sup>50</sup> Situated in the North-Eastern Transvaal.
- <sup>51</sup> Twenty-third biennial report of the National Council (1974-1976), page 31.
- <sup>52</sup> Seventeenth biennial report of the National Council (1962-1964), page 14.
- <sup>53</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Executive Committee 22-23 October 1947, annexure D.
- <sup>54</sup> In his concluding address at the Conference on Industrial Ophthalmology (November 1958) Dr M. Franks mentioned that figures published by the Workmen's Compensation Commissioner indicated that more than 20 000 eye injuries occurred yearly in factories in the country at that time.
- <sup>55</sup> Tenth biennial report (1948-1949) page 21.
- <sup>56</sup> The Ophthalmological Society of South Africa was granted representation on the National Council at a meeting of the Executive Committee held in March 1949, with one representative. Dr J. S. du Toit, a well-known ophthalmologist of Cape Town, was the Society's first representative.
- <sup>57</sup> At present called Human Sciences Research Council (H.S.R.C.)
- <sup>58</sup> Dr Op't Hof is on the staff of the Department of Health at the present time.
- <sup>59</sup> A survey of Hereditary Blindness at the School for the Blind at Worcester. Research Series No. 49. National Bureau of Educational and Social Research.
- <sup>60</sup> A Survey of Hereditary Blindness, page 36.
- <sup>61</sup> A Survey of Hereditary Blindness, etc., page 31.
- <sup>62</sup> A Survey of Hereditary Blindness, etc., page 17.
- <sup>63</sup> A Survey of Hereditary Blindness, etc., page 23.
- <sup>64</sup> The Chief Officer of the Bureau was initially called the Director. Later the name of the post was changed to the Bureau Administrative Officer when the Organising Secretary of the National Council received the designation of Director.
- <sup>65</sup> Tour No. 190, 1-11 September 1974.



## CHAPTER 12

### *THE DIVISIONS FOR INDIAN AND COLOURED BLIND*

Emanating from Government policy by which each population group must be responsible for welfare work amongst its own handicapped, two divisions, namely the Division for Indian Blind and the Division for Coloured Blind, were established in 1968. The modus operandi for the implementation of the policy was laid down in Circular No. 29 of 1966 which was received from the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions. A second circular was issued in 1978 (No. 65 of 1978) which contained a somewhat different view regarding the structure of the National Council. This is at present being studied by an ad hoc committee of the Council. The Divisions have however been established in accordance with the instructions set down in the first circular, No. 29 of 1966. Perhaps it is necessary at this stage to state the policy as set forth in the second circular (No. 65 of 1978):

“As welfare work is of and for the community and as the welfare of the various population groups can accordingly best be served and promoted by their own organizations, the ideal still remains to establish and maintain separate welfare organizations for the various population groups at national, as well as regional and local levels.”

After receipt of the first circular a sub-committee was appointed to study the implications of the instructions. The report of this sub-committee, as well as other matters relating to the implementation of the policy, were fully discussed at meetings of both the Executive Committee and the Council, held in October 1966. It was resolved to request the various organizations of the two population groups to meet, with a view to establishing interim Divisions until the necessary amendments to the constitution could be introduced to authorise the establishment of the Divisions. Three persons were appointed to act as advisers to the

organizations. They were Mr A.B.W. Marlow for the Coloured group and Dr W. Cohen and Mr V.H. Vaughan for the Indian group.

By virtue of the fact that at that time there were no organizations exclusively controlled by Blacks no interim Division could be established for that population group.

It should be mentioned here that the new dispensation met with some opposition from various quarters. The circular stipulated that representatives of the Divisions could attend meetings of the Executive Committee only, and then only when matters relating to the Divisions were discussed. It was felt that they should also be allowed to attend Council meetings and meetings of the special committees in order to obtain the necessary training which was advocated by the circular<sup>1</sup> itself. Later on, however, they were allowed to attend meetings of both the Executive Committee and the Council by a ruling of the Chairman of Council.

### **Interim Division for Indian Blind**

A preliminary meeting of the representatives of the Natal Indian Blind Society and the Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind<sup>2</sup> with the two advisers of Council was held in Durban on 25 February 1967.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the two advisers the following were present:

Mr C.M. Bassa – Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind and Natal Indian Blind Society

Miss C.J. King – Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind

Mr B.C. Nursoo – Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind

Mr C. Nayanah – Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind and Natal Indian Blind Society.

Dr Cohen was elected chairman.

At the beginning of the meeting the position of the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association was discussed. The consensus of opinion was that, in view of the fact that the Society comprised two population groups (Indian and Coloured), it could not affiliate to the Division for Indian Blind. Mr Bassa, on behalf of the two Indian organizations, offered to co-opt an Indian representative on to the Division for Indian Blind.

After various aspects of the establishment of a Division for Indian Blind had been discussed, a proposal consisting of seven paragraphs was adopted. The first paragraph read as follows:

“It was resolved

That the Natal Indian Blind Society and the Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind agree to the establishment of the Indian Affairs Division of the South African National Council for the Blind, which will be called Division of Indian Affairs, South African National Council for the Blind.”

The other paragraphs concerned procedures and administrative matters, except paragraph three in which it was requested that the representatives of the Division be allowed to attend meetings of all special committees of the Council.

These proposals and other matters in connection with the Division were laid before a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council, held 27 – 28 April 1967. Mr Bassa was present as the representative of the Interim Division for Indian Blind.<sup>4</sup> The Chairman of Council expressed his appreciation towards the Indian societies for their co-operation in connection with the establishment of a Division for Indian Blind. They were requested to continue to take the lead in convening a foundation meeting.

Following on this the Natal Indian Blind Society convened a meeting for 30 March 1968. At this meeting three organizations were represented, namely:

Natal Indian Blind Society

New Horizon School for the Blind

Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association

The representation was as follows:

Natal Indian Blind Society:

Mr Jack Naidoo, Mr J. Kissoon Singh, Mr Z.M. Yacoob.

New Horizon School for the Blind:

Mr C.M. Bassa, Mr H. Gokool, Mr B.C. Nursoo.

Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association

Mr I.F.H. Mayet, Mr W. Goliath, Mr H. Merckel, Mr H. Rhoda.

Mr C.M. Bassa was unanimously elected chairman of the meeting.

Various matters connected with the new dispensation were discussed, especially with regard to problems arising from the interpretation of certain sections of the circular of the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions. Notwithstanding the fact that it was felt that these still needed elucidation, the meeting resolved to proceed with the establishment of a Division. The resolution with regard to this read as follows:

“Formation of Interim Division of Indian Affairs of the South African National Council for the Blind

Mr J. Kissoon Singh formally moved that an Interim Division of Indian Affairs of the South African National Council for the Blind be established.”

Mr Mayet supported the resolution.

The following persons were elected members of the Executive Committee of the Interim Division:

Mr C.M. Bassa (Chairman)

Mr J. Kissoon Singh (Honorary Secretary)

Mr J. Naidoo

Mr B.C. Nursoo

Mr I.F.H. Mayet.

Attention was also given to the terms of reference of the Division which read as follows:

“To deal with all matters concerning the welfare and rehabilitation of the Indian blind and partially sighted, and the prevention of blindness.”

Until the adoption of the amended constitution of the Council the Interim Division would function as such and then become the official Division, bearing the name of:

The South African National Council for the Blind Division for Indian Blind.

This approval was obtained at a meeting of the National Council held 23-25 October 1968 when the Constitution was appropriately amended.

### **Interim Division for Coloured Blind**

With regard to the establishment of a Division for Coloured Blind, there were certain obstacles which caused some delay. At that time there was only one organization which was entirely controlled by Coloured persons, namely the League of Friends of the Blind, with its head office in Cape Town. Branches existed in other parts of the country where there was a concentration of the Coloured population. The other organizations which, together with other commitments, also served the Coloured blind, were White-controlled.

There were five such organizations. Serious efforts were made to persuade these bodies to become members of the Division, but without success. The foundation meeting which was convened for 27 July 1968, therefore consisted of representatives of only two organizations,



namely the League of Friends of the Blind and the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association. The representation consisted of the following:

League of Friends of the Blind:

Messrs I.J. Jacobs, H. Carelse, M.P. Lewin, B. Williams, F.W. Paulse.

(Observers: Mrs I. Jacobs and Mrs S. Johnson).

Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association

Messrs W.R. Goliath, H. Merckel, H. Rhoda, Miss J.M. Fredericks, Mr I.F.H. Mayet.

Messrs A.B.W. Marlow and S.K. Wentworth represented the National Council for the Blind.

Mr W.R. Goliath was unanimously elected Chairman.

At the meeting the question of representation of White-administered societies which also served Coloured blind persons was once more raised. At this stage the affiliation of these societies had not been resolved and there were misgivings in certain quarters whether this was constitutionally possible.

After lengthy discussions the meeting resolved to form a Division for Coloured Blind, and in this connection the minutes state the following:

“The meeting unanimously agreed to the principle of forming a Division. Mr I. Jacobs proposed, seconded by Mr F. Paulse, that a sub-committee be appointed to word the preamble and the resolution.”

The “preamble” was a brief outline of the course of events. The following resolution was then moved:

“This meeting of delegates of two duly constituted Blind Welfare Societies, namely the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association and the League of Friends of the Blind, resolves that a Division of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, to be styled the S.A. National Council for the Blind Division for Coloured Blind be and is hereby established with the said Societies as its foundation members, for the better co-ordination and development of welfare work for Coloured blind persons throughout the Republic of South Africa.”

The following persons were elected as members of the Executive Committee of the Division:

Mr W. R. Goliath — chairman

Mr I. J. Jacobs — vice-chairman  
Miss J. M. Fredericks — honorary treasurer  
Mr M. P. Lewin  
Mr P. Williams  
Mr H. Rhoda

It was also resolved to advertise the post of full-time secretary, but for the time being to appoint someone in a temporary capacity. Mr H. Rhoda was offered the post and he accepted. Accordingly he could not have a seat on the Executive Committee, and Mr H. Merkel was elected in his place.

Furthermore it was resolved that the head office of the Division would be situated in Johannesburg. The first meeting of the Executive Committee was convened for 23 August 1968 in Johannesburg.

Authorization for the establishment of both Divisions was obtained by the adoption of the amended constitution at a meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind held 23-25 October 1968.

### **Division for Indian Blind**

After the establishment of the Division for Indian Blind a sub-committee was appointed by the Executive Committee of the National Council to draw up regulations in which the objectives, powers and financial commitments of the Division were laid down. Before the regulations were put into operation they were submitted to the Division for comment and possible amendments.

The objectives as stated in the regulations were the same as those incorporated in the terms of reference which were approved at the inaugural meeting, namely "to deal with all matters concerning the welfare and rehabilitation of the Indian blind and partially sighted, and the prevention of blindness".

The powers of the Division are set out in five paragraphs, the first of which reads as follows:

"The Division shall be the consultative and advisory body to the South African National Council for the Blind on all matters concerning Indian blind persons and shall have power, subject to the approval of the Council or its Executive Committee, to do all such things as may be necessary to carry out its aims."

With regard to the financial aspect it was stipulated that estimates of expenditure should be submitted annually before 31 August to the Executive Committee of Council for approval. Furthermore accounts



Division for Indian Blind — Executive Committee with staff. Front: M. N. Ramson (Hon. Treasurer), J. Kissoon Singh (Vice-chairman), C. M. Bassa (Chairman), Mrs M. E. Naidoo, K. R. Sitaran (Secretary). Back: Dr M. A. Docrat, Sister A. Naidu (nurse), R. K. W. Thandroyen (Dept. of Indian Affairs), Z. M. Yacoob, A. N. Lazarus, B. C. Nursoo, Mrs N. Essop (typist/clerk).



The official opening of the Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind (later the New Horizon School for the Blind) by Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, Chairman of the S. A. National Council for the Blind, in Durban on 2 October 1954. With him is Rev. A. W. Blaxall (left) and Mr K. M. Pillay.



of income and expenditure should be properly kept and an audited statement submitted annually. The customary precautions should be taken with regard to the financial affairs of the Division.

The regulations also dealt with matters such as membership and affiliation, the seat of the head office of the Division, the number of office bearers and their term of office, procedure for the convening of meetings, the size of the quorum, the keeping of minutes and other records, the framing of reports, the right of possession, the appointment of personnel, the organising of conferences and the procedure in connection with the amendment of the regulations. The regulations therefore embraced all matters relating to the efficient administration and organization of the Division.

With regard to the proposed activities of the Division, the chairman, Mr C. M. Bassa, submitted a programme of action to the Executive Committee of Council,<sup>5</sup> its main features being the following:

To establish the incidence of blindness and preventable eye diseases in areas which have a large concentration of the Indian population. With regard to this it will also be determined whether the surveys so far conducted by the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness have adequately covered all the areas where the Indian population is concentrated.

To investigate the education of the blind and the partially sighted child insofar as the geographical situation of the school is concerned; to determine further whether the facilities for higher education for blind Indian students are adequate. With regard to this, representations will be addressed to the authorities for the granting of government bursaries to Indian students and the establishment of a Readjustment Board.

To investigate all aspects of placement, which includes the effectiveness of sheltered workshops, the need for new crafts in such workshops, opportunities for employment in the open labour market and an evaluation of the potential of every blind worker in order to establish the best field of employment for each person.

To promote the social and cultural activities for Indian Blind in order to establish closer contact with the general public, and the integration of the blind person into society.

To conduct surveys to ascertain the flow of newly blinded persons needing rehabilitation, with a view to the establishment of a rehabilitation centre which may possibly also serve as a holiday home.

To publicise the facilities and aids which are made available to the



blind by the National Council and from other quarters.

The above resumé of the objectives illustrates the wide field to be covered in order to create a fairly efficient service to the Indian blind community.

After the above exposition by Mr Bassa, Mr Theo Pauw, chairman of the Council, expressed his thanks and appreciation to the various Indian and Coloured organizations and all persons who had assisted, for the satisfactory manner in which the matter had been conducted. The minutes of the meeting reported the last part of his speech as follows:

“He (the chairman) stated that he had been struck by the fact that the Council was coming to grips with certain aspects of its problems in a different manner than in the past and he was confident that this would in the long run be to the benefit of the people concerned and that the work would develop along lines and in fields which had not been touched before.”<sup>6</sup>

After almost three years of preparation, which included the introduction of interim measures, the first general meeting of the Division for Indian Blind was held in the boardroom of the Orient Islamic Education Trust, Orient Hall, Centenary Road, Durban, on Saturday 22 February 1969. The following representatives of Societies were present:

Natal Indian Blind Society

Messrs M. S. Archery, H. Gokool, J. Kissoon Singh, E. A. Kahn and Z. Yacoob.

New Horizon School for the Blind

Messrs C. M. Bassa, H. N. Lazarus, J. Naidoo, R. Naidoo, C. Nursoo.

Also present: Dr W. Cohen and Mr V. H. Vaughan, representatives of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr I. F. H. Mayet, co-opted member and chairman of the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association.

In order to ensure that the meeting was properly constituted it was proposed by Mr J. Naidoo and seconded by Mr E. A. Kahn that the S.A. National Council for the Blind Division for Indian Blind be formally constituted in accordance with clause 7(a)(1) of the constitution of the South African National Council for the Blind. Included in the proposal was the recommendation that the Chairman of the Interim

Division for Indian Blind, Mr C. M. Bassa, act as chairman until the elections took place later. This was carried.

After this the regulations which had been framed by the Executive Committee of the National Council and amended by the Interim Division, were approved.

The question of membership of the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association was then discussed. It was decided that since the Society did not exclusively serve the Indian blind it could not become affiliated to the Division, but could be an associate member.

The election of officers and members of the Executive committee then took place. The following were elected:

Chairman	: Mr C. M. Bassa
Vice-Chairman	: Mr J. Naidoo
Honorary Treasurer	: Mr E. A. Kahn
Members of the Executive Committee	: Mr J. Kissoon Singh Mr H. Gokool Mr A. N. Lazarus.

The co-option of the three members was referred to the Executive of the Divisions.

The estimates of expenditure for the amount of R5 150 was approved for submission to the Executive Committee of the National Council. The estimates made provision, amongst other things, for the equipping of an office and the appointment of a secretary.

After this the proceedings were mainly administrative. The Executive Committee was instructed to give the necessary attention to the various matters which were incorporated in the objectives of the Division and in the programme of action. After this the meeting adjourned.

The first meeting of the Executive Committee of the Division was held on 15 August 1969. All the members were present, as well as Dr W. Cohen, representative of the National Council.

After Mr B. C. Nursoo and Mr I. F. H. Mayet had been co-opted as members of the Executive Committee, the status of the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association once more came under discussion. A letter had been received from the National Council in which it was confirmed that, by virtue of the fact that the Association mainly served the Coloured community, and admitted blind Indians to their workshop, the Association was not entitled to full membership of the Division for Indian Blind, but could acquire associate membership.

Thereupon it was decided to extend an invitation to the Association to become an associate member of the Division.<sup>7</sup>

After this the amendments to the regulations which an ad hoc committee of the Executive Committee of the National Council had recommended were scrutinised and approved.

Two important aspects came under discussion, namely the placement of Indian blind persons in open labour, and the prevention of blindness.

With regard to placement it was decided to make use of the services of Mr L. S. Watson, second employment officer of the National Council. Particulars in connection with school-leavers should be forwarded to him in good time.

The question was raised with regard to the subsidising of tours conducted by the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness on behalf of the Indian community, and the chairman informed the meeting that the matter had already been laid before the Department of Indian Affairs. The chairman also mentioned that the Division was kept informed and that reports of the Division had been made available. He stated further that the Natal Indian Blind Society, in collaboration with the Bureau, had organised an operation clinic at the Shifa Hospital from 26 July to 6 August 1968, and that 28 operations had been performed.

It was resolved to request the Bureau to make provision for one tour per annum for the Indian community. The Natal Midlands should be granted first priority.

The following statistics in connection with the incidence of blindness among Indians in the Republic were released:

	1967/1968	1968/1969
Natal	337	363
Rest of the Republic	33	34
Total	370	397

The rest of the meeting was devoted purely to administrative matters. This included the renting of an office, the purchasing of furniture, the appointment of an auditor, travelling expenses, revision of the estimates and the advertising of the secretarial post. The latter was regarded as very urgent.

The minutes of the above meeting served as the chairman's report at the meeting of the Executive Committee of Council, held on 23 and 24 October 1969.

The second meeting of the Executive Committee of the Division was

held on 13 March 1970, and the second general meeting on 13 June 1970. Mr C. Nayanah of the staff of the Natal Indian Blind Society acted temporarily as secretary, as the permanent secretary had not yet assumed office. The chairman was able to announce, however, that Mr S. K. Sitaram had been appointed and would shortly take office.<sup>8</sup> At the meeting all serving office bearers and members of the Executive Committee were re-elected en bloc.

At the biennial meeting of the National Council held on 20-22 October 1970 in Port Elizabeth, Mr Bassa delivered his chairman's report to the full Council for the first time. An important aspect of the report was the attention given to the prevention of blindness. The Division co-operated closely with the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, which had conducted a diagnostic tour shortly before (10 to 19 September 1970) in the Indian areas of Northern Natal.

Mr Bassa likewise expressed his appreciation for the co-operation which had been built up between the Council and the Division. Furthermore he and his Executive Committee were encouraged by the interest shown in the Division by the Department of Indian Affairs.

The subsequent participation in the discussions by Mr Bassa and his colleague, Mr H. Gokool, not only illustrates the exceptional insight which the Division had already acquired in matters involving the blind in general, but also the interest taken in the welfare of individual blind persons. Thereafter eight motions were submitted on behalf of the Division, the majority of which were carried with only a few amendments. Examples of matters which were proposed were the following: training of social workers, increased pensions, relaxing of the means test, training of blind Indians as physiotherapists, increased augmentation allowances for blind Indian workers, and the appointment of an additional employment officer.

After the report of the Division had been dealt with, the Chairman of the Council, Mr Theo Pauw, expressed his thanks to the representatives of the Division. The minutes report as follows:

"The Chairman stated that it was his pleasure, in a very real sense, to thank Mr Bassa and Mr Gokool for the contribution which they had made to this session of the conference, and to congratulate the Division on its sterling work and the report which it had been able to present."<sup>9</sup>

The next chairman's report of the Division was presented at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council, held on 14-16 April



1971. As an annexure to the report, a memorandum was added by the Secretary of the Division, giving an account of an extensive tour which he had undertaken to the Transvaal, with a view to investigating the circumstances of Indian blind in that province. At the same time it was also an orientation visit, since he had called at the head office of Council, and at the office of the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association in Johannesburg. He conferred with interested persons and paid visits to several ordinary schools on the East Rand, which indicated that there were quite a number of children with eye defects in the schools. With regard to this, it was resolved that the Division should approach the Department of Optometry of the Witwatersrand Technicon with the request that a survey of refraction problems amongst Indian children be conducted.

When examining the subsequent records of the Division one becomes aware of the fact that there is one aspect of the work which overshadows all others, namely the intensified efforts employed for the prevention of blindness among the Indian community. Besides the regular tours which were conducted by the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, the Division had also organised a series of day-clinics in various parts of Natal where there was a large concentration of Indians. In this connection the Chairman of the Bureau wrote in his report which was presented to the biennial meeting of the Council, held October 1974:

“Unquestionably during the period under review the greatest progress was in the field of extending ophthalmic services to the Indian Community. A new system was brought into operation whereby eight one-day clinics amongst Indians in outlying areas will in future be conducted annually by an Indian ophthalmologist. These clinics will be mainly diagnostic in nature with treatment for minor eye complaints. . . For this purpose and in order to do the necessary follow-up work of Bureau tours, the Committee recommended that a full-time Indian ophthalmic nurse be appointed to the staff of the Bureau and that she be seconded to the Division for Indian Blind.”

The first nurse assumed duties on 26 August 1974, but after six months was replaced by another. The latter started work on 17 February 1975, and is still in service.

The success of the one-day clinics is proved by the statistics supplied

in the chairman's report to the Executive Committee of the Council.<sup>10</sup> He writes as follows:

"The full programme of one-day clinics was successfully completed. Over 1 085 persons were examined. Of these 472 were referred for refraction purposes, 106 required operative treatment and 233 were treated at the clinics for various eye ailments. The large turnout at these clinics made it necessary for two ophthalmologists to be taken to the last three clinics."

The chairman also remarks that the nurse does valuable follow-up work, especially with regard to the referring of patients to hospitals. She submits weekly reports to the Secretary of the Division and bi-monthly reports to the Assistant Director (Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness).

Another aspect of the activities of the Division was the efforts of the secretary to establish committees in the Transvaal in areas where there is a fairly large Indian population. In 1973 a meeting was held in Benoni on the East Rand, which was attended by 65 persons. A committee was formed to promote the cause of the Indian blind in that part of the province. Although it certainly was a worthy effort, the interest gradually waned and plans to establish similar committees in Lenasia (Johannesburg) and Laudium (Pretoria) were abandoned.

An outstanding event in the programme of the Division for Indian Blind was the organising of a conference on the education of the visually handicapped. The conference was held at the University of Durban - Westville on 31 July and 1 August 1975. The following information appeared in a report released by the secretary of the Division:

"114 delegates all told, and many visitors attended the conference. They came from schools for the blind, eight organizations for the welfare of the blind, three government departments, forty ordinary schools, and the University of Durban - Westville."

The Conference was opened by Professor R. E. van der Ross, Rector of the University of the Western Cape. The addresses, which were delivered by educationists in the field, covered the most important aspects of the education of both the blind and the partially sighted. The discussions which followed were lively and the conference can be regarded as highly successful.

In April 1979 a second conference was held by the Division for Indian Blind in co-operation with the Division for Coloured Blind in Durban. The theme was: Meet the Blind. It formed part of the jubilee programme of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

The conference was chiefly concerned with the practical provision of services to adult blind persons. Besides the addresses (one of which dealt with hereditary factors), three study group meetings were held, where various aspects of voluntary work in the field were discussed.

Approximately 70 persons attended the conference, representing various organizations involved in the provision of services to the blind in the Republic.

An aspect of social welfare work which constantly engaged the attention of the Division, was its efforts to improve the financial position of the blind workers, especially those in the workshop. Representations were regularly made to the National Council and the authorities to increase the augmentation allowances and to lower the means test for qualifying for a pension. Attention was also given to a home workers scheme.

With regard to placement, there was a continual search for suitable avenues of employment. In co-operation with the employment officer of the National Council, blind persons were placed with a firm for the stringing of tennis racquets. This can be considered a positive breakthrough.

The provision of rehabilitation services to newly blinded persons has occupied the serious attention of the Division during the past few years. As an alternative to a rehabilitation centre, a system of residential rehabilitation is being contemplated where persons can receive the necessary professional services in their homes. In connection with this, recreation facilities for blind people also occupied the attention of the Division. With this in mind a reading centre was opened in Durban, and efforts were started to make it possible for blind persons to play bowls.

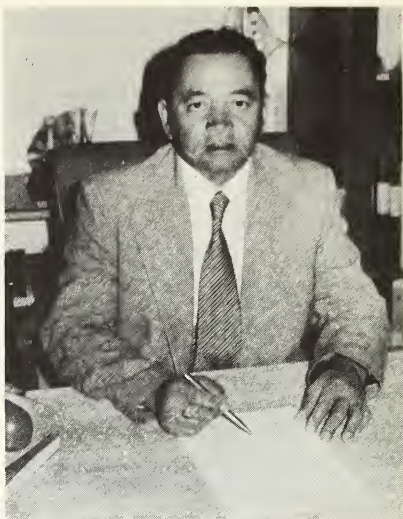
With regard to mobility, a person was trained as a mobility instructor to provide instruction to workers in the workshop, and other blind people, in the use of the long cane.

It has previously been stated that plans were afoot to divide the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association into two organizations, one of which would serve the Coloureds, and the other the Indians. In his report to the Executive Committee (meeting of 18-20 April 1979) the chairman of the Division announced that this had been accomplished, and that the new Association would henceforth be known as the Transvaal Indian Association for the Care of the Visually Handicapped.





Mr C. M. Bassa, Chairman of the Division for Indian Blind, Chairman of the Natal Society for the Care of Indian Blind and Deaf, Chairman of Board of the New Horizon School for the Blind.



Mr W. R. Goliath, Chairman of the Division for Coloured Blind, Chairman of Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped.



Mr K. M. Pillay, founder of the New Horizon School for the Blind, former Chairman of the Natal Society for Indian Blind.



Mr I. J. Jacobs, founder member of the League of Friends of the Blind and one time member of the Division for Coloured Blind.



To conclude, it must be mentioned that in the short space at our disposal, it is impossible to do justice to all the activities of the Division. It is a section of the work of the National Council which is carried out with enthusiasm, insight and efficiency.

### **Mr C. M. Bassa**

Mr Cassim M. Bassa, whose name has often been mentioned in connection with the history of the Division for Indian Blind, has for the past quarter century played a prominent role in connection with this branch of welfare work for the blind. There is virtually no aspect of service to the Indian blind in which he has not been involved in some way or other, or with which he has not had contact. His rendering of assistance, however, is not confined to the blind alone. His sphere of interest has in course of time expanded, and at present he is also concerned with the provision of services to other categories of handicapped persons. In addition to this he falls within that group of business men who concern themselves with the needs of the underprivileged in the community, and are prepared to render assistance. By virtue of this and other attributes which will be dealt with later, his interesting life story deserves closer scrutiny.

After the young Cassim Bassa had matriculated at Sastri College in Durban in 1944, it was his father's wish that he should become a doctor. In fact, his father, who was a wealthy business man, cherished the ambition that both his sons would enter the medical profession so that they could establish clinics where free medical services could be provided from a trust fund started by himself. Cassim, however, preferred to study law, should he decide to enter a university. However, he finally chose to start working.

His brother did in fact become a doctor, and is a professor in psychiatry in London at the present time.

When speaking of his mother, Mr Bassa says she was a wonderful woman who constantly rendered assistance to those in need. This quality was ingrained in her children, which may possibly be the reason why her son felt the urge to be of help to the underprivileged.

After passing the matriculation examination, Mr Bassa, through the good offices of an ex-teacher who was on the staff of the University of Natal at the time, accepted a post as assistant research worker in the Department of Economics at the University. The research concerned

the economic circumstances of the Indians in Natal, and in this way he became acquainted with the various strata of the Indian community. He had to analyse the completed forms. He also read a great deal about the immigration of the Indians to South Africa. All this knowledge stood him in good stead later on in the field of welfare work.

After he had resigned from his post at the University, he was approached by Mr R. Reddy, honorary treasurer of the Natal Indian Blind Society at that time, to assist him with fund-raising. Mr Bassa's duty was to place collection boxes in factories and public places and to return them after a certain time. He also had to count the money. He had plenty of time at his disposal and felt that he was performing a necessary task, albeit a simple one. This was the beginning of his involvement with the blind. A further step in this connection was when he was asked to become the secretary of the Society in 1953. A crisis situation had arisen in the office. Mr K. M. Pillay, then Chairman of the Society, was in India where he had gone to be married, the secretary (Miss Evans) had resigned and Mr Jack Naidoo, vice-chairman of the Society, and incidentally also an ex-teacher of his, asked him to deputise as honorary secretary until the annual meeting, when he was elected. Mr Bassa admits that, by reason of his involvement with the work amongst the blind, his attitude towards life had changed. It influenced his entire future. He now worked with a specific aim in view. He also felt more settled.

The subsequent history of Mr Bassa's work among the blind is the history of the Natal Indian Blind Society, the New Horizon School for the Blind and the Division for Indian Blind. In addition to this we should also mention his activities with regard to the establishment of the Indian School for the Deaf in 1968, and consequently the alteration in the name of the Society to the Natal Indian Blind and Deaf Society. He also took an active part in the establishment of the school for the cerebral palsied, and serves on the committee.

Apart from what has already been written about the Division for Indian Blind, Mr Bassa played a vital role in connection with its establishment in the midst of numerous problems which had arisen. The present writer was privileged to have served on the Division as a representative of the National Council since its inception, and can therefore bear witness to the seriousness and sense of responsibility with which Mr Bassa had undertaken the task. His only motive was to seek what was best for the blind in his community, and to find ways and

means to improve their position and status. All other matters were of secondary importance. All those concerned with welfare work are deeply impressed by his thoughtful and balanced views on these matters. It was largely due to his leadership that the Division could be of such valuable service. The reports which he presented to the meetings of the Executive Committee and the National Council were comprehensive and informative — indicative of his interest in the cause which he holds so dear.

Mr Bassa was a member of three delegations which represented the National Council at conferences overseas. In 1969 he was an observer at the Conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (W.C.W.B.) in New Delhi. The other two delegates were refused entry to India and he was therefore the only representative from South Africa. According to reports received, he acquitted himself well of his task. In 1974 he was one of the delegates of the National Council to the W.C.W.B. Conference, held in Sao Paulo. In July 1978 Mr Bassa, together with the Director, represented the National Council at a conference of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, held at Oxford, England. On his return he submitted an informative report on the proceedings.

Mr Bassa has connections with various welfare organizations and projects. He is a trustee of the Muslim Home for Orphans, a Joint Honorary Secretary of the Orient Islamic Educational Institute, and also Joint Honorary Secretary of the Indian Centenary Scholarship Trust. He is a trustee of the Chatsworth Early Learning Centre.

Mr Bassa is active in various sporting bodies. He is involved in the administration of cricket on regional, provincial, and national level. He was the first vice-president of the Natal Cricket Board of Control and is at present a councillor on the S.A. Cricket Board of Control. He is also connected with the administration of table-tennis. He has been President of the S.A. Table Tennis Board since 1956, and is Vice-President, Southern Natal Table Tennis Union.

After his father's death he became a director in his father's firm and in 1964 he started his own business as an estate agent in Durban. In this capacity he was able to build up many contacts in the business world and the community, of which he is an esteemed member. As proof of this he has received two special awards. On 16 September 1974 the J. N. Reddy trophy was awarded to him by the Jaycees<sup>11</sup> for exceptional services to the community. The second award was made to

him at a ceremonial meeting of the Durban City Council held on 4 March 1977. The City Honours were conferred on him for his outstanding service to the community, especially with regard to the welfare of the blind. Since 1954, when these awards were introduced, 41 citizens of Durban had been honoured in this way. The citation which was presented to each recipient was entered in the Civic Honours Book. The citation presented to Mr Bassa read as follows:

"In grateful acknowledgement of many years of dedicated and outstanding service to the Indian Community in the Welfare, Sporting and Educational fields and particularly in recognition of his great contribution in the interests of the Blind, especially through the Natal Indian Blind Society."

The Executive Committee of the S.A. National Council for the Blind resolved to present the R. W. Bowen medal, the Council's highest award, to Mr Bassa at the time of the jubilee celebrations which take place in November 1979, for meritorious services rendered in connection with the welfare of the blind.

### **Division for Coloured Blind**

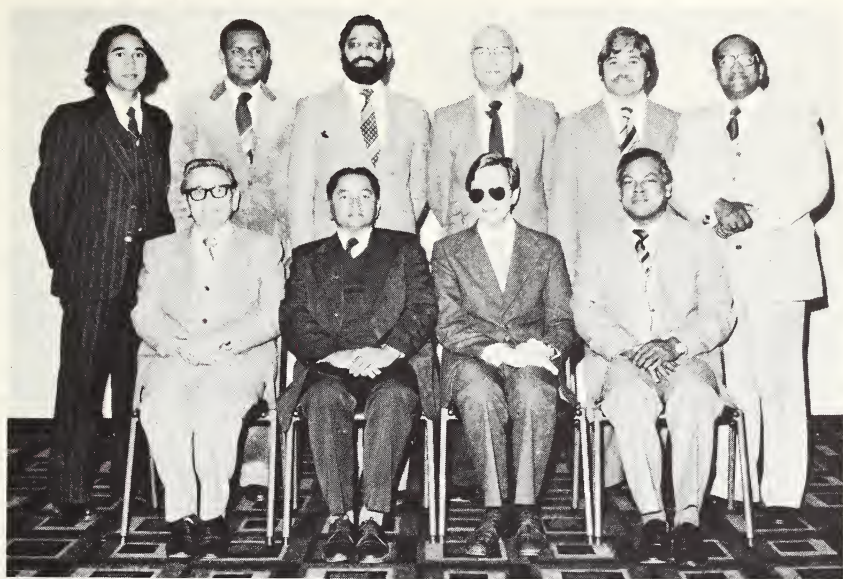
The first general meeting of the Division for Coloured Blind was held in Cape Town on 8 March 1969. The same delegates who had attended the first meeting of the interim Division in 1967 were present. The representative of the Council was Mr G. Schermbrucker.<sup>12</sup> With regard to the founding of the Division, the minutes report the following:

"This meeting constituting members of the Transvaal Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association and the League of Friends of the Blind, meeting in Cape Town on the 8th March 1969 resolves:-

- (a) To form the S.A. National Council Division for Coloured Blind to serve the interests and co-ordinate the work among the Coloured Blind throughout the Republic;
- (b) To strive for the ultimate autonomy of the Coloured Division pursuant to the government directive for parallel development in Welfare Organization;
- (c) To work in close collaboration with the S.A. National Council for the Blind and the state in its efforts to advance the level of complete independence when we will be capable of managing our own affairs.

Proposed by Mr P. Williams, seconded by Mr P. Adams. Unanimously agreed."





Division for Coloured Blind — Executive Committee. Back: C. D. Beilings, R. E. Perils, Rev. P. M. Bam, H. J. Carlse, Vice-chairman, H. H. Rhoda, M. P. Lewin, Treasurer. Front: Dr J. J. Fourie, Liaison Officer, W. R. Goliath, Chairman, W. P. Rowland, Director of the National Council, J. W. Davis, Secretary.



Holiday Home of the League of Friends for the Blind at Strandfontein, Cape Town.

After a few amendments to the regulations had been made, the election of the Executive Committee took place. The following were elected:

Chairman: Mr W. R. Goliath

Vice-Chairman: Mr I. J. Jacobs

Honorary Treasurer: Miss J. M. Fredericks

Members: Messrs P. Williams, M. P. Lewin and H. Merkel.

With regard to the co-opting of the three additional members who were permitted by the constitution, it was decided to refer the matter to the Executive Committee. The latter was also instructed to make arrangements for the appointment of a full-time secretary.

After a few administrative matters had been disposed of the meeting was adjourned.

The first report of the Division, which was presented to the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council held on 22 – 24 October 1969, dealt mostly with procedure and policy. The question of representation on the Division of societies which provide services to blind Coloured persons was again raised, and the chairman deplored the fact that the Division had no contact with these blind persons. In this connection the resolution taken by the Executive Committee of the Division at its meeting of 9 August 1969 was quoted. It read as follows:

“That the S.A. National Council for the Blind be requested to include the chairman or secretary of the Division when interviews are held with Societies dealing with the Coloureds in respect of their problems or development.”

It was clear that the Division wished to be kept informed with regard to all matters relating to blind Coloured persons, so that services could be provided where necessary.

At the biennial meeting of the Council, held 21 to 23 October 1970, the matter was again discussed. Messrs I. Jacobs and H. Rhoda were present as representatives of the Division for Coloured Blind. The assurance was given that a solution was assiduously being sought. At the conclusion of the discussion the Chairman of the Council made a statement on the matter, which the minutes reported as follows:

“The Chairman appealed to the meeting to accept the bona fides of all concerned and the integrity of those working in this field and representing the various organizations . . . He gave the representatives of the Division for Coloured Blind the assurance that

any mistakes which may have occurred in this connection had not been intentional, and that it was a question of finding a *modus operandi* through experience and goodwill."

At the meeting the two representatives of the Division submitted motions which had a specific bearing on matters concerning the Coloured blind. Firstly it was proposed that the National Council should take steps to conduct a survey of Coloured blind persons in the Republic, with a view to establishing societies where they were needed. The chairman replied that the Executive Committee of Council was engaged in an investigation of gaps in services for the blind.

Proposals were also submitted in connection with the increase in the amount of the pensions paid out to Coloured blind persons, an increase in the subsidies paid on behalf of Coloured social workers and an increase in the salaries of the administrative personnel of workshops.

The report which was presented by the chairman of the Division, Mr W. R. Goliath, to both the meetings of the Executive Committee (23-24 October 1972), and the 21st biennial meeting of the Council (25-27 October 1972), contained information concerning certain developments which had taken place during the previous period.

Firstly it was stated that a third organization had affiliated to the Division, namely the Beacon Club of Cape Town. Furthermore it was announced that, as a result of a very successful tour which the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness had conducted in Oudtshoorn from 13-22 September 1971, a society had been formed there. Messrs I. J. Jacobs and H. Rhoda accompanied the tour and were instrumental in establishing the society.

The Division also concerned itself with the lot of the deaf-blind in the community and inquired from various bodies about procedures which should be followed in order to be of service to such persons. It was announced that the Athlone School for the Blind had been granted permission to establish a division for deaf-blind in 1973.

The chairman of the Division concluded his report with the suggestion that the time had arrived for the appointment of a full-time secretary, so that more attention could be devoted to essential developments.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council, held on 15-17 October 1973, the post of secretary was approved. His headquarters would be in Cape Town. Moreover it was decided that arrangements



be made to equip an office for the secretary in Geneva House, the building where the public relations officer of the Council was accommodated. In view of this the head office of the Division was moved from Johannesburg to Cape Town.

After the post had been advertised and the customary procedures had been followed, Mr J. W. Davis was appointed full-time secretary of the Division for Coloured Blind. He assumed duty on 1 April 1974. A Consultative Committee was appointed to serve him with advice, to see that his office was properly equipped and to assist him with the drafting of a programme of action, including visits to institutions.

Mr Davis immediately proved to be a diligent worker with a good insight into matters. He had to enter a new, and for him unfamiliar, field, and he realised that it was of prime importance that he should become acquainted with the extent of the problem before he could in any way be able to continue with his programme. For that reason he immediately started compiling a register of Coloured blind persons who were registered under the Blind Persons Act. His immediate source of information was the Department of Coloured Affairs. After conferring with senior officials, he was given permission to obtain the names and addresses from their official register. It was a formidable undertaking but essential for the efficient provision of services. The matter was discussed at the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the Division and it was decided that Mr Davis should conduct a tracing campaign in order to keep his register up to date and as complete as possible.

As an annexure to the agenda of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Division which was convened for 10 August 1974 there was a report on the secretary's activities for the period 13 May to 15 July 1974.

The report was informative insofar as it gave an indication of what the secretary had already achieved since he had assumed duty. He remarked that he had learnt much from Mr W. P. Rowland, the public relations officer, whose office was in the same building. Mr Rowland's advice served as a basis for his knowledge of and attitude towards the blind. With regard to further fruitful contacts he mentioned the co-operation he had received from both the Principal of the Athlone School for the Blind and the Manager of the workshop of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society. He was appointed as a member of the Welfare Committee of the Society. He had already visited 40 blind persons,



rendered assistance, and done follow-up work where it was needed. He was also invited to be the guest speaker at the annual meeting of the League of Friends of the Blind, and participated in a seminar with blind persons at another branch. All this and much more was accomplished, apart from his administrative duties.

This first report indicates that from the beginning Mr Davis had become absorbed in his work. His subsequent activities convincingly proved that the Division for Coloured Blind (and the National Council) had gained in him an officer who would be a great acquisition for promoting the interests of the blind. This was confirmed by his second report (up to December 1974) from which it was evident that he had carried on with the work which he had begun. He had, amongst other things, accompanied a tour of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness to Upington and its environs, and was going on a tour to Bredasdorp later. With regard to placement in employment he had begun to make contact with factories and had received a list of ex-pupils from the Athlone School with the purpose of doing follow-up work.

His activities also extended to the rural areas. A society had already been established at Oudtshoorn, with a committee of 15 members. Plans were set in motion to establish a similar society at Stellenbosch and possibly another at Upington. In connection with this matter he reports the following:

“Because it is a known fact that the blind in the country areas are not reaping the full benefits available to them, I feel that no effort should be spared to establish local committees in the larger towns to report the needs to our office.”

However, the establishment of local committees did not prove to be a success. After a while the Oudtshoorn committee, of whom much had been expected, ceased to exist. As a result of this it remained a problem to reach the blind in the country districts. This must still be regarded as one of the gaps in the provision of services. The secretary had at one time expressed the opinion that the solution to this problem should be sought in the establishment of branches of the League of Friends of the Blind in the country districts. Attempts should also be made to obtain the services of other welfare organizations, including the churches.

With regard to welfare work in the country areas, the efforts of the secretary when he accompanies the tours of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, should also be mentioned. He uses the opportunity

to visit blind persons in the surrounding area. Apart from the reports by the officers of the Bureau, the secretary presents his own as well. In these he sets out the welfare work which has been done. In this connection it can be stated that fairly large areas of the country have already been covered, such as the South-Western Districts, the North-West Cape and Rehoboth in South West Africa. According to the reports good results have been obtained, but the secretary feels that these efforts are not sufficient to solve the problem of the rural Coloured blind person.

The biennial meeting of the Division was held on 7 February 1976 in Cape Town. The chairman's report for the period October 1975 to February 1976 indicated that considerable progress had been made with regard to various aspects of the work.

At the beginning the chairman stated that three organizations were affiliated to the Division. The Beacon Club was the third. In addition, associate membership was granted to the Welfare Commission of the "Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sending Kerk in Suid-Afrika". Although the other societies which serve the Coloured blind had not yet affiliated, the chairman stated that a better understanding had developed between them, which could be regarded as very encouraging. This was mainly due to the good contacts which the secretary had established.

An important event which was cited in the chairman's report was the opening of the Strandfontein Holiday Home for Coloured Blind, which took place on 15 February 1975. It is a project of the League of Friends of the Blind. Since the opening a year before, 105 guests had already been received. The question of financial assistance from the National Council was discussed.

The chairman reported further that much thought had been given to the rehabilitation and placement in employment of blind Coloureds.

A serious obstacle in the path of those seeking employment in the open labour market was their lack of proper training and rehabilitation. A programme for this had to be drawn up and urgent efforts made to carry it into effect. A committee was set up to go into the matter.

To conclude the chairman expressed his thanks to the two representatives of the National Council, Dr J. J. Fourie and Mr C. K. Lord<sup>13</sup> for their advice and guidance.

The following persons were elected as members of the Executive Committee of the Division for the period 1976 to 1978:

Chairman: Mr W. R. Goliath  
Vice-Chairman: Mr M. P. Lewin  
Honorary Treasurer: Mr P. N. Koff  
Members: Mr H. Rhoda  
          Mr C. D. Beilings  
          Mr H. Carelse.

In the secretary's report for the period August 1976 to February 1977, two very important matters were mentioned. The first was that on the Bureau tour to the Vredendal area, which had been conducted in collaboration with the Department of Health, special attention had been given to school-going children, with the result that 140 pairs of spectacles had been prescribed for them by the visiting optometrist. The second matter was also connected with the tours of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. The report contained a list of tours which had been planned for 1977. It included the following areas: Citrusdal, Oudtshoorn, Beaufort West and Prieska. In this connection the secretary writes that although it may appear that he was often out of town, his involvement with the tours is nevertheless of benefit to the blind in rural areas. Before embarking on a tour a list of registered blind persons in that area is drawn up. Personal contacts are then made and assistance is given where it is needed. He considers this to be the only way to make direct contact with the rural blind.

An event which proved that the Division promotes all facets of services to the blind, was the organising of a conference on the education of the visually handicapped which was held on 7-8 July 1977 at the University of the Western Cape, Bellville, Cape Town. The theme of the conference was: Education and Preparation for Life. Addresses were delivered by teachers from schools for Whites, Coloureds and Indians. The conference covered a wide spectrum of educational matters, and was a great success.

Another development which took place in 1977 was the increase in the number of organizations which affiliated to the Division. The chairman stated in his report for the period April to September 1977 that the number amounted to seven. He also announced that the Society for Coloured and Indian Blind had been divided into two, namely Services to the Blind and Visually Handicapped, and Transvaal Indian Association for the Care of the Visually Handicapped.

The last matter which deserves attention in this review of the Div-

ision is its fifth biennial meeting which was held on 3 February 1979 in Cape Town.

A feature of the meeting was the large number of persons who attended. There were 27 representatives from eight organizations. These included the White-controlled societies. In addition to the two official representatives of the National Council, the Director and three members of the Executive Committee of the Council were also present. Therefore the total number of those who attended was 33. One recalls the first general meeting a decade ago, when only nine representatives of two organizations attended. For that reason progress can be reported. After the reports of the chairman and the secretary had been dealt with, a representative of each of the societies submitted a brief report.

The secretary in his report gave an account of the main aspects of his activities. It included contacts with approximately sixteen bodies, information in connection with the prevention of blindness, the provision of services to rural blind persons, and employment. The latter was considered a major priority during the past biennial term. In this connection the secretary submitted a schedule containing data on 24 persons who had been placed in employment during the period June 1976 to August 1978, with the place of employment and the type of work. They were employed, inter alia, as machine minders, packers, operators, wire strippers, sandpaperers, envelope-fillers, label-stickers, assistants in clothing factories, carpet layers and labourers.

In conclusion it may be placed on record that during the ten years of its existence the Division has made considerable progress in the interests of the Coloured blind in our country.

### **Mr W. R. Goliath**

Since Mr Goliath has for many years rendered outstanding services to the Coloured and Indian blind of the Witwatersrand and other parts of the Transvaal, and has been chairman of the Division for Coloured blind continuously since its inception in 1968, it is certainly fitting at this stage to give a brief outline of his life and work. He was the Principal of a large primary school on the outskirts of Johannesburg at the time of his retirement in 1978. In the midst of his heavy responsibilities as Principal of the school, he also served his community in various capacities, in the best educational tradition. After many years of experience in the provision of services to the blind it is not suprising that, for



the past decade, he was able to take upon himself the leadership of the Division for Coloured Blind.

William Richard Goliath was born on 27 October 1914 at Rouxville in the Free State. At the age of six years he accompanied his parents to Johannesburg where he completed his school career. In December 1933 he qualified as a teacher at the Eurafican Training College, and at the beginning of 1934 he was appointed as an assistant teacher at the Newclare Primary School.

It is noteworthy that he remained on the staff of the school for 44 years until his retirement in 1978. His periods of service were as follows:

Assistant teacher: 11 years

Senior assistant: 7 years

Vice-principal: 10 years

Principal: 16 years.

In the meantime he had improved his qualifications by means of private and part-time study. He obtained the Transvaal Teachers' Lower Diploma and the Transvaal Teachers' Diploma at the Rand College of Education.

The Newclare Primary School grew to such an extent that between 1962 and 1965 it was the largest school in the Republic with 2 500 pupils and 72 teachers. It needs special organizational ability and a strong personality to manage a school of that size.

Long before he began to take an interest in the welfare of the blind, he had been connected with an organization which afforded underprivileged children the opportunity of spending a holiday at the seaside. In 1932 he was the co-founder of the Transvaal Coloured Children's Seaside Fund. He is still actively engaged in the project.

His connection with the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association started in 1954, when he was elected a member of its Board of Management as well as its Executive Council. In 1977 two organizations developed from this body, the one serving Indian blind persons, named the Transvaal Indian Association for the Care of the Visually Handicapped, and the other serving the Coloured blind, called Services to the Blind and Visually Handicapped. Mr Goliath was elected as chairman of the latter at its foundation meeting. He continues to serve in that capacity. He states that since his retirement he is able to devote more time to the activities of the society. As an example of this, he assisted in starting the game of bowls amongst the blind of the

workshop at Coronationville (near Johannesburg). He plays the game himself. When the Coronationville Region of the national Association of Blind Bowlers was formed, he was elected President of the Region. He took a team of bowlers to a tournament in Salisbury, Rhodesia, in 1978.

With regard to his community interest it should be mentioned that he was appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Coloured Management Committee of the Johannesburg City Council for the period April 1968 to November 1977.

The chairmanship of the Division for Coloured blind should however be regarded as his major task in the provision of services to the blind. He has occupied this position from its inception in 1968 up to the present time. That he has identified himself the Division is shown by the reports which he presented at meetings of the Executive Committee and the National Council. It can be said that at times he took a strong view about certain matters but it was always done in the best interests of the blind.

<sup>1</sup> Circular No. 29 of 1966.

<sup>2</sup> In January 1968 the name of the school was changed to the New Horizon School for the Blind.

<sup>3</sup> Report of this meeting is attached as Annexure C to the minutes of the meeting of the Executives Committee of Council, held 27-28 April 1967.

<sup>4</sup> There were no representatives of a Coloured society. Mr Marlow reported in a letter that negotiations were still being conducted in connection with the establishment of a Division for Coloured Blind.

<sup>5</sup> At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 20 and 21 October 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of meeting of the Executive Committee held 21 and 22 October 1968 (100th), page 7.

<sup>7</sup> When the Association was divided into two sections in 1977, full membership was granted to the new body, namely the Transvaal Indian Association for the Care of the Visually Handicapped.

<sup>8</sup> Mr Sitaram assumed office as secretary of the Division for Indian Blind on 27 June 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the biennial meeting held 20-22 October 1970, page 14.

<sup>10</sup> Meeting of 5-7 May 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Junior Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>12</sup> The other representative was Mr T. E. Cutten, but he was absent.

<sup>13</sup> Mr Lord was appointed in the place of Mr L. Jerwis, who had resigned.

## *CHAPTER 13*

### *FOUR CHAIRMEN AND TWO PRESIDENTS*

Since its establishment fifty years ago the S.A. National Council for the Blind has had six chairmen. The life and work of two of these, namely the first Chairman, Adv. R. W. Bowen, and Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, have already been reviewed. The other four, viz. Dr A. W. Blaxall, Mr A. B. W. Marlow, Dr Walter Cohen and Mr Theo Pauw, will now receive attention. They will be dealt with in the above order, although this is not according to their chronological terms of office. Dr Blaxall and Mr Marlow receive priority by reason of the fact that both have already passed away. Dr Cohen and Mr Pauw are still active in the service of the Council — Dr Cohen as a member and chairman of various committees, and Mr Pauw as Chairman of the Council.

The Council has had only two presidents, one of whom is still living. The first was Miss Josephine Ethel Wood, who was elected to the honorary post in 1952. After her death in 1965 the honour was conferred on Mr Colin Anderson.

#### **Dr A. W. Blaxall**

Since Dr A. W. Blaxall was one of the founder members of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, and for more than a quarter of a century was deeply involved with its development, it stands to reason that a large part of his life and work has already come under review in the preceding chapters of this history. This also applies to his connection with other organizations. Here the Athlone School for the Blind, the Transvaal Society for Blind Blacks, the Palmer Eye Hospital and the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness come to mind. His interests and activities embraced such a wide field — and were not confined to the welfare of the blind alone — that it is certainly fitting to review the many facets of his life and work.

Arthur William Blaxall was born on 15 May 1891 near London, England. After he had completed his schooling at Blackheath, South London, he was engaged in clerical work for three years. He then entered St. Augustine's College, Canterbury, to be trained as a "missioner". After that he attended Keble College, Oxford, from 1914 to 1920. His studies were interrupted, however, from 1915 to 1918, on account of military service in the Balkan States<sup>1</sup> during the first World War.

His term of office in the Anglican Church began in 1921 when he was ordained in the diocese of Birmingham. He was appointed as assistant chaplain, specially charged to minister to the spiritual needs of the deaf community in the city.

In February 1923 he arrived in South Africa, where he was initially appointed assistant priest of St. John's Church in Cape Town. In 1925 he became the rector of Maitland, near Cape Town.

It was during this period of his ministry that he came into contact with blind Coloured children, which led to the establishment of the Athlone School for the Blind. This part of the history has already been recounted. His interest in the education of the blind had however grown to such an extent that he agreed to act as superintendent of the Athlone School.

Blaxall's major contribution to services to the blind was however connected with the establishment of the S.A. National Council for the Blind. Mention has already been made of his meeting with Miss Josie Wood of the Library for the Blind, the convening of the first conference in Bloemfontein in 1928, where he played the leading role and presided as chairman, and the conference which was held in Cape Town on 18-20 March, where the founding of the Council took place.

As has been indicated in the chapter describing the initial years of the National Council, he tried to avoid the chairmanship, mainly by reason of the fact that at that time he was also the Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Deaf. It appeared to be difficult for him to decide whether he should give more attention to the deaf or to the blind. He was deeply interested in the work among the deaf, considering that he had started with it in England, and then in Cape Town.

Nevertheless, after Adv. Bowen's sudden death in 1948, he agreed to be nominated as Chairman of the Council. He was the obvious choice, and his election was unanimous. He occupied the chair for only two terms, and in 1952 was instrumental in having Dr Louis van Schalkwijk



elected in his stead. During Mr Blaxall's term of office as Chairman his chief interest lay in the promotion of welfare services, education, and ophthalmic services to the Black blind population. In this connection mention should be made of the committee which was appointed with the object of improving these services and of his efforts to obtain qualified teachers for the schools for Black blind children, which were in the process of being established.

After Mr Blaxall's departure from the Athlone School in 1937 he settled on the Witwatersrand. In that same year he started a project on a small scale in a dwelling house in a suburb of Johannesburg for the provision of sheltered employment for blind Blacks. For its management he formed the Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind. A year later, in 1938, when the house in Johannesburg had become too small, he decided to start an institution near Roodepoort on the West Rand, and called it Ezenzeleni. It was subsequently moved to Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria, and finally replaced by a new institution named Itireleng, in Ga-Rankuwa,<sup>2</sup> near Pretoria. At the present time it provides sheltered employment and accommodation for more than 350 blind Blacks. Itireleng can serve as a monument in honour of Arthur Blaxall for the insight and initiative which he showed under difficult circumstances for the advancement of services to Blind Black people. He was the superintendent of Ezenzeleni up to 1954 when he retired. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy (*honoris causa*) was bestowed on him by the University of the Witwatersrand in 1956 for outstanding services rendered to the blind of South Africa.

By reason of his interest in both the blind and the deaf, and to promote their cause, he made extensive preparations for a visit by Helen Keller, the famous deaf-blind American woman, to South Africa in 1951. This was a unique event which met with widespread interest. A description of her visit appears elsewhere.

Dr Blaxall was fond of writing, and left several valuable booklets which had a direct bearing on the history of welfare work for the blind in South Africa. Parts of these are strictly personal and contain interesting anecdotes about various facets of the activities in which he was involved. Descriptions of certain aspects of the work which do not appear in the records of the Council are contained in these booklets, and have been cited in this history of the Council.

After the first conference which was held in Bloemfontein in June 1929, to establish the National Council, Dr Blaxall published a pam-

phlet entitled *Care of South Africa's Blind*, which contained a report of the proceedings. This is the only existing record of that first meeting.

In 1937 he issued a booklet called *Ten Cameos from Darkest Africa*. In the foreword he writes, amongst other things: "These are not pictures of heathen darkness, although that shadow will also penetrate our pages. We write of physical darkness which is called blindness". In this booklet he writes about the Athlone School for the Blind, of the work and the pupils there, also about meetings on blindness which he addressed and journeys with the pupils which he undertook. He concluded a report of a meeting which was held in Kimberley with the following words: "So was sown the germ of an idea which has since grown into a national organization, doing a fine work and known as the League of Friends of the Blind."

A survey of the work which was done during the first decade (1937-1947) of the existence of Ezenzeleni was given in a booklet with the title of *The Battle for Light*. It was published by the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind. The last few pages deal with the establishment of the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf as well as with its section for deaf-blind pupils.

*Blindness His Servant* deals with the life and work of Robert Walter Bowen, advocate, member of parliament, and chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind until his death in 1948. It is a gripping story of Bowen's youth, of his being blinded on the battlefield, his studies in England, his legal career in Cape Town, his wide interests and his chairmanship of the National Council.

After Helen Keller's departure from South Africa, a description of her visit appeared in book form with the title *Helen Keller under the Southern Cross*. It is an illustrated publication, which, apart from a summary of her journeys, also contains a section which was written by herself, and which in some measure revealed her philosophy of life. Prior to Helen Keller's arrival in South Africa, Dr Blaxall had published a souvenir programme in which her itinerary was set out, and which also contained an account of the various forms of welfare work on behalf of the blind and deaf which existed in South Africa. At that time, according to the brochure, Dr Blaxall was the Chairman of both the National Council for the Blind and the National Council for the Deaf.

It has been casually mentioned before that Dr Blaxall was particularly active in connection with welfare work for the deaf. He played a major role in the establishment of the S.A. National Council for the

Deaf in April 1929, and was the Chairman of the Council for many years. He also concerned himself with the development of education for deaf Blacks, and was the founder of the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf near Roodepoort (later moved to the Republic of Bophuthatswana in the vicinity of Rustenburg, Transvaal).

The story of the establishment of the Kutlwanong School is indeed interesting. Dr H. A. Mocke<sup>3</sup> states that when Dr Blaxall was the superintendent of Ezenzeleni he often received requests for assistance, also on behalf of the deaf. On a certain day in the early forties he received a message from the railway police saying that a homeless deaf Black boy had been found on the Johannesburg station. He was taken to Ezenzeleni, where Dr Blaxall discovered by means of signs that he must have boarded a train somewhere, perhaps out of curiosity, with the result that he had landed in Johannesburg. Dr Blaxall immediately made contact with interested persons with the object of beginning with the education of deaf Blacks. "The presence of this deaf boy served as an impetus for the establishment of the Kutlwanong School for Bantu Deaf", writes Dr Mocke. The school was opened on 1 July 1944. Later on a deaf-blind department was also started at the school.

In 1960 Dr Blaxall announced that he would no longer be available for election as a member of the Executive Committee of the S.A. National Council for the blind. At that time he had already severed virtually all his ties with other organizations for the blind. In his Curriculum Vitae he writes: "December 31st 1960 — plans to resign and lead a quiet life". In 1964 he left South Africa to settle in England, where he died towards the end of 1970.

### **Mr A. B. W. Marlow**

Alfred Baden Willisby Marlow will be remembered in the first place as the principal of the Athlone School for the Blind, Bellville South, Cape Town, where for twenty seven and a half years he did outstanding work as an educationist. The numerous tributes paid to him when he retired, as well as at the time of his death in 1968, are evidence of the high regard in which he was held and of the dedication with which he performed his task.

However, his service to the blind was by no means restricted to the Athlone School for the Blind. In point of fact, it was the role he played in the development of the S.A. National Council for the Blind which prompts us to give a brief account of his life and work.

A. B. W. Marlow was born in England in the year 1900. After having completed his school career he obtained the Cambridge Senior Certificate. He already began teaching at the early age of sixteen. After his military service during the First World War (1914-1918), he enrolled as a student at Westminster College, London. In 1921 he received the Teachers' Certificate with a distinction in Physical Education. In 1922 he obtained the B.A. degree from the University of London, with Education, Latin, Mathematics and French as final year subjects. He was then appointed as a teacher of French at a high school in Essex. Subsequently he emigrated to South Africa, where he joined the staff of a training college in Transkei. He remained there for four years. After that he became Principal of Blythwood College. In 1930 he was appointed senior teacher in mathematics at the Boys' High School, Observatory, Cape Town, where he later became vice-principal. He held this post until the end of 1937, when he was appointed principal of the Athlone School for the Blind, Bellville, Cape Town, from January 1938. With regard to his additional academic studies and qualifications, it may be mentioned that while he was mathematics master he studied part-time at the University of Cape Town, and in 1931 obtained an M.A. degree in French.<sup>4</sup> It is also worthy of note that, by reason of the fact that he considered it necessary to become proficient in the Afrikaans language, he passed the "Hoër Taalbond" examination in the thirties.

When Marlow accepted the principalship of the Athlone School for the Blind in January 1938 (after the departure of Dr Blaxall), the school was still situated in temporary buildings at Faure. However, the preliminary work connected with the building of a new school south of Bellville had already begun. He set about the task of planning the buildings with his characteristic zeal, with the result that the first section was occupied as early as July 1941.

Mr Marlow became a member of the National Council for the first time when he attended the fifth biennial meeting in 1939, as one of the representatives of the Board of Management of the Athlone School for the Blind. He was elected a member of the Executive committee at the next biennial meeting in 1941.

A feature of his membership was his special interest in the Constitution of the Council. He believed that the effective functioning of the National Council depended on its constitution. Therefore, in his opinion, the constitution was the factor which determined whether the



highest possible degree of service could be provided to all blind persons. In addition he had set himself the task of making sure that all projects undertaken by the Council were meticulously carried out in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

When the co-ordinating function of the Council, according to his view, failed to bring about fully the necessary provision of services to all blind persons in this country, he put forward a proposal to consider the desirability of converting the Council into a National Institute.<sup>5</sup> The matter was referred to the Executive Committee for investigation. It has previously been stated that considerable opposition was encountered from the affiliated societies and consequently the scheme had to be abandoned. However, it had its merits, since with the amending of the constitution in 1958, wider powers were given to the Council to undertake its own projects.

Mr Marlow's share in the amendments to the constitution which had become necessary with the formation of the two divisions, is worthy of mention. He was appointed to advise the Division for Coloured Blind during its period of preparation. Tragically he was deprived of attending the meeting of the Council at which the amended constitution was approved and finalised<sup>6</sup> as he died a month before the meeting took place.

Since 1952 he had served the Council as its first and second vice-chairman during various terms, and at the biennial meeting of the Council held on 28 to 30 October 1964 he was elected Chairman of the Council. With regard to this, Theo E. G. Cutten writes as follows:<sup>7</sup>

"As Chairman, Mr Marlow was quietly presuasive and, while himself convinced of the course discussion should take and the correct decisions that should be made, scrupulously observed the impartial attitude of the chair in allowing those who disagreed with him to state their points of view."

He served as Chairman for only one term (1964-1966). In his chairman's report which covers the period, he gives a clear exposition of the growth of the Council over the years, and the major role it had played in welfare work for the blind, not only in South Africa, but also in other parts of the world. In connection with the unique pattern of specialised committees for which provision is made in the constitution, he writes as follows:

"The 18th Biennial Report, which I am privileged here to present, is itself, by its composite nature, witness to the evolution

that has taken place; for, in view of the growing complexity and diversity of Council's activities, I have deemed it desirable not to attempt to draft the whole, but to ask each of the Chairmen of the main Council Committees to write his own report on those sections of the Council's work for which his committee has been responsible during the past two years."<sup>8</sup>

The above provides a clear picture of the situation with regard to the development of the provision of services by the Council in that specific period.

Mr Marlow on two occasions represented the National Council abroad at conferences of the International Council for the Education of the Visually Handicapped, the first in Bussum, Holland in 1952, and the second in Hanover, West Germany in 1962. After the conference in Bussum he undertook a study tour through Holland and Belgium and wrote an informative report on it.

In *Infama* of April 1967 Mr Marlow wrote a frank and thought-provoking article under the heading: *In Retrospect*. He wrote about himself, about blindness, his pupils, his school choir trained by himself, their successes, and about the members of his staff. We quote only one of the many meaningful sayings:

"The degree of success a teacher may achieve is the extent to which his pupils make him forget they are blind."

We conclude this review of his life and work with the last paragraph of the abovementioned article:

"But, problems or no problems, the years spent working amongst and with the blind boys and girls of the Athlone School for the Blind will remain the happiest of all, even if my only epitaph will be

He did but pass this way  
And tarried a while  
To build and to teach  
And to make a little music  
Among the children he loved."

After his retirement his health began to deteriorate. At times he was unable to attend meetings of the Executive Committee, but continued to serve the Council as far as his strength permitted. He died on 23 September 1968.

## Dr Walter Cohen

When Walter Cohen attended a biennial meeting of the S.A. National Council for the Blind for the first time in October 1944, he was a member of the five-man delegation of the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind.<sup>9</sup> It was the beginning of a long and fruitful, yet at times stormy, connection with the National Council, which would last without interruption up to the present time. His service to his blind colleagues, however, did not take place solely within the framework of the National Council, as he was also connected with organizations which operated outside the Council's sphere of work. It even extended to services to other categories of handicapped persons. Before enlarging on this aspect we must first turn our attention to the years of his youth. It is mainly a story of the struggle of a young blind man carving out a place in life for himself.

Walter Cohen was born on 3 July 1910 in Kimberley where he began his school career at an ordinary school. His father died in 1918, and in 1922 his mother moved to Bloemhof where she became the manageress of a hotel. Walter was then sent to a school in Johannesburg to continue his education. Shortly after this he began to experience problems with his eyes, and in his matriculation year in 1926 he was compelled to leave the school on account of deteriorating eyesight. Ophthalmologists diagnosed his condition as glaucoma. He returned to Bloemhof and helped his mother in the hotel bar. At the end of 1928 he accompanied her to Germany (with financial aid from their relations) to undergo treatment, but the ophthalmologist there could do nothing to improve his condition. After spending two months in Europe they returned to South Africa. He was then completely blind.

Both mother and son were desperate. They knew of no societies for the blind until a commercial traveller told them about the Library for the Blind in Grahamstown, from which they subsequently received an aluminium sheet with the braille symbols of the alphabet embossed on it, as well as a braille manual. The latter was read to him by acquaintances, and, with the aid of the braille signs on the aluminium sheet, he taught himself braille. He became a regular reader of the Library. Later he also received a braille writing frame and a style<sup>10</sup> from the library and began to write braille. The next step was the acquisition of an old typewriter. He taught himself typewriting, and could then type the menus of the hotel and help his mother with her cor-

response. After hearing of the "Nuwe Pionier", a periodical in braille which was issued by the Worcester School for the Blind, he also learnt Afrikaans braille.

His urge to study further was stimulated by the achievement of another blind person, John Tennant, who had obtained the B.A. degree by means of a correspondence course. Cohen first passed the matriculation examination and then began his B.A. course. He chose psychology and Xhosa for his major subjects. He relates that some of the customers in the bar used to read to him so that he could copy the lectures in braille on the writing frame.<sup>11</sup> A policeman who knew Xhosa helped him with the language. While working in the bar he was obliged to know the precise position of each kind of liquor on the shelves. He was helped, however, by his clients, with whom he was on very good terms. During that time his mother presented him with a piano accordion which he learnt to play by himself and with which he could entertain the customers.

With regard to his studies, he admits that it was providential that he had decided on Xhosa as a major subject for his degree. It stood him good stead in later life.

In 1937 his mother died and his uncle took over the hotel. In 1938 he moved to Johannesburg, where he first lived with his brother, then with acquaintances and later in a boarding house in Hillbrow. At that time there was an accordion competition in Johannesburg. His brother entered his name, and he won. This opened the door for performances in various places of entertainment, as well as on the radio. In the meantime he continued with his studies and towards the end of 1938 he passed the second year of the B.A. course. From December 1938 to July 1939 he was a member of a concert group which toured the whole of South Africa. He continued with his studies on the tour. Friends posted the lectures in braille to the various places where the troupe appeared. In July 1939 he was back in Johannesburg, and in November 1939 he passed his final examination for the B.A. degree of the University of South Africa.

On a day in April 1940, shortly after the beginning of the Second World War, he was with his brother in Krugersdorp, where he met a certain person. The following day he received a telephone call from the same man, and the conversation went as follows: The person: "What about joining the Union Defence Force?" Cohen: "Are you nuts? I am blind". Nevertheless the following day he accompanied the man to an



office where he had an interview with a brigadier. The result was an appointment in the intelligence section of the Department of Defence.

He was in the service of this department from May 1940 to November 1945. Meanwhile he continued with his studies and in 1943 obtained the M.A. degree in English, with distinction, from the University of South Africa.

After his demobilisation from the Department of Defence in November 1945, the Department of Non-European Affairs of the Johannesburg City Council was looking for someone with a knowledge of psychology and a Black language. Since he had taken psychology and Xhosa as the major subjects for his B.A. degree, he was well qualified for the post, and was appointed.

He entered the service of the City Council of Johannesburg on 27 November 1945. When the Department of Non-European Affairs came under the management of the West Rand Administration Board on 1 July 1973, he was transferred. At the time of his retirement he was reappointed and in 1978 received an award for devoted service from the West Rand Administration Board.

His involvement with welfare services to the blind originated from his meeting with the Rev. A. W. Blaxall in 1941. The latter was the superintendent of the institution for Black blind persons at Ezenzeleni near Roodepoort at that time. It was not long before Cohen served on the Executive Committee of the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind. He did very valuable work on this committee and was the chairman of the Society at one time. His connection with the above led to contact with the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind. In 1943 he was elected a member of the Executive Committee under the chairmanship of Mrs G. K. Nowlan, who had then already occupied the chair for approximately 17 years, since before the time of the establishment of the Council. In 1946 he was elected to the chair. After a year he was succeeded by Mr D. N. Myrray, who would afterwards become the honorary treasurer of the National Council. Dr Cohen served as a committee member of the Society from 1943 to 1976, when he resigned.

Before proceeding to discuss Dr Cohen's role in the activities of the National Council, we wish to describe some of his numerous "outside" interests. The first of these is his connection with Lions International, a service club which operates internationally and has branches in most countries of the world.

His first contact with this club was when he addressed the Krugersdorp branch. He was nominated as an honorary member but could not attend the meetings on account of the distance from his home. In February 1963 he was asked to address the Johannesburg Wilds Club, and was immediately invited to join. Shortly afterwards he was elected secretary of the branch, and served in that capacity until 1972. In that year he received the award for the "Secretary of the Year" from all Lions Clubs in the whole of the Republic. In 1974 he was elected president of his club for that year. Lions International, with more than a million members, perform a great work in connection with the welfare of the blind and the prevention of blindness throughout the world. The organization supplies the well-known Banks braille machine to blind people everywhere at a nominal price. It is called after Alfred Banks, its designer in America. The Lions Clubs have already provided considerable assistance to welfare organizations in South Africa. An example of this is the financial aid given to the League of Friends of the Blind for the erection of the Strandfontein Home for the Blind near Cape Town. Lions also introduced a project named Bright Sight. Discarded spectacles are collected and their frames supplied to those who need them but are unable to afford new ones. The scheme is controlled by the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. The principle of providing assistance to blind persons is applied throughout the world since it is written into the constitution of the organization.

When the Southern Transvaal Regional Welfare Board came into existence in 1948 Dr Cohen was elected as a member. He remained a member until 1963, and was re-elected in 1975. To illustrate his wide interests, a list of organizations with which he has been connected at different times over the years is given below:

Chairman of the Non-European Committee of the Transvaal Cripple Care Society (8 years)

Member of the Johannesburg branch of the S.A. National Tuberculosis Association (4 years)

Member of the Committee of the National War Memorial Health Foundation (6 years)

Member of the Indian Welfare Society (2 years)

Foundation member of the Rosebank Bowling Club for the Blind in combination with the Rosebank Bowling Club.

Member of the Board of Management of the Colonel Rowland Home for the Deaf-Blind and the Aged Deaf.

He was elected as a member of the Executive Committee of the Council for the first time in 1950. As time went on he was nominated on committees and sub-committees, and subsequently served on most of the Council's special committees at different times. When the activities of these committees were under review in previous chapters, his participation received attention. The following are the committees and sub-committees on which Dr Cohen serves at present:

Executive Committee of the National Council

Committee for Blind Blacks (Chairman)

Committee of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness

Committee for Employment

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Dagbestuur<sup>12</sup>

Committee for International Relations (Chairman)

Gaps in Services Sub-Committee (Chairman)

Committee for the Multiple Handicapped (Chairman)

Management Committee for Braille Services (Chairman)

Council's representative in the Division for Indian Blind

Executive Committee of the S.A. Federal Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled.

Dr Cohen was elected as one of seven members of the Council "on the ground of their knowledge and services in the field of welfare work for blind people".

He is also the present editor of *Imfama*, the mouthpiece of the Council, and of two magazines which the Council publishes in the Black languages, namely *Sedibeng* and *Ilanga Lethu*. These two magazines were reported on in a previous chapter.

Dr Cohen was elected second Vice-Chairman of the Council in 1954, and in 1956 first Vice-Chairman. He held this office until the death of the Chairman, Dr Louis van Schalkwijk. By virtue of the fact that he was the first Vice-Chairman, he deputised as Chairman until the next election. This took place in October 1962, when he was elected to the chair. He officiated in this capacity until 1964, when he was succeeded by Mr A.B.W. Marlow.

In his Chairman's report<sup>13</sup> Dr Cohen presents a detailed account of the developments which took place during his term of office (1962-1964). The majority of these matters received attention in preceding chapters. Nevertheless, one aspect of his report should be mentioned, namely Dr Cohen's reference to the achievements of blind persons

during that period. This matter lies near to his heart, and in *Imfama* he consistently refers to such persons. It is his aim to bring the cause of the blind to the attention of the public by means of this publication. In this connection he writes in his report:

“A blind man in the person of Kenneth McIntyre became professor of history at the University of Natal, while another blind man, Pieter Pronk, returned to his old job as a diesel motor mechanic in Pretoria — both are totally blind. A blind Coloured man, David Giebbelaar of Cape Town, opened a general dealer’s business, while another blind Coloured man, Frans Raman, obtained a post as a teacher in a high school for sighted pupils in the Cape.”

He also mentions participation in the community by concert groups consisting of blind artists. Various organizations of all population groups take part in these activities. He reports further on two blind writers whose books had appeared at that time. In this connection he writes:

“An autobiography such as *Kindly Light* by Miss Marjorie Watson, the blind Vice-President of the National Council, or *Kinders van die Donker*<sup>14</sup> by J.C. Mostert of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization, likewise give publicity to our work while enlightening the reader on the feelings and emotions of a blind person.”

Dr Cohen had a very important share in devising braille systems for Black languages. He was chairman of the Technical Committee which was established for that purpose by the National Council in 1950. Blind braille experts from the Black population groups played a significant role in this undertaking. After years of intensive study and research it can be said that 1967 was the year when the work had reached completion. Long after that, however, alterations were still made to the systems. It was only in 1976 that a bound volume of the completed systems was presented to the Minister of Plural Relations at a meeting of the National Council.

In 1962 Dr Cohen received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (*honoris causa*) from the University of the Witwatersrand, for his great work in connection with braille in the Black languages of the Republic.

His fame as a braille expert became known in international circles. In 1960 he was invited to serve on the World Braille Council. At a meeting of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind which he attended in New York in 1964 he was elected chairman of the World



Braille Council, an office which he held until 1974. This was an outstanding achievement for a South African.

In 1974 the World Braille Council became part of the Cultural Committee of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, and in 1977 Dr Cohen was elected as Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Braille Linguistics.

His connection with the World Braille Council implied that all possible problems with regard to braille over the entire world would be referred to him for comment and, if need be, for a solution. In this connection it can be stated that his advice was sought on Samoan braille, braille in three other languages of Polynesia and two of Red Indian tribes in South America. In this case Spanish braille had to be taken into consideration. He was unable to reply to an enquiry from Afghanistan, as his amanuensis could not decipher the writing. He also received enquiries from numerous other countries. Mr A.C. Zeelie of Braille Services was of invaluable assistance with all this work.

As chairman of the World Braille Council he was a member of the Executive Committee of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, and in this capacity he attended meetings in Belgrade in 1967 and in Moscow in 1972. Although he was barred from attending the meeting of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind in New Delhi, India, in 1969, he was nevertheless elected chairman of the World Braille Council in his absence. In 1974 he attended the meeting of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind in Sao Paulo as a member of the National Council's delegation. The other members of the delegation were Mr Theo Pauw and Mr C.M. Bassa, with Dr J.J. Fourie as an observer.

Walter Cohen was married to Bertie Herring (also blind) from Graaff Reinet in 1946. She was introduced to him by Miss Marjorie Watson of Cape Town, who taught her braille by means of correspondence. A very happy marriage ended sadly when Bertie passed away in 1969. She had worked on a telephone exchange in Johannesburg, and was a very pleasant, outgoing person. In 1970 he was married again, to Gladys Evans, the blind founder of the Guide Dog movement in South Africa, of which more will be reported in the following chapter.

Walter Cohen is a person who takes an interest in cultural matters. For the past 28 years he has regularly attended symphony concerts in the Johannesburg City Hall, and enjoys visiting the theatre. He pos-

sesses a large number of classical music records, and is widely read. He is especially interested in Jewish history of the Middle Ages. He has many contacts at all levels of the community, and can be called a well-adjusted blind person. At meetings he can state his case most convincingly, partly owing to the fact that he is an exceptionally fluent speaker.

The R.W. Bowen Medal for meritorious service to the blind will be awarded to him at the Golden Jubilee commemorative function of the National Council in November 1979.

### **Mr Theo Pauw**

For a number of years Mr Theo Pauw simultaneously filled two important posts in the field of services to the blind. From 1961 he was the Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind and since 1966 he has been the Chairman of the South African National Council for the Blind. His principalship and his chairmanship were connected in many respects. In the first instance he guided the blind child to adulthood, and in the second he gave direction to his own final product in order to assist the latter to take his place in the community in a meaningful manner. We can therefore assume that his service to the child led quite naturally to service to the adult. No one else can explain this transition better than himself, as recorded in the 1978 report of the Worcester School for the Blind:

“The programme of tuition, instruction and education which the school offers, is aimed at leading the visually handicapped child to personal independence so as to enable him to leave school with the prospect of becoming a contributing and well-adjusted member of his immediate environment, an acceptable blind person in a seeing community and a responsible citizen of his country.”

These and numerous other pronouncements over the years indisputably demonstrate the faith Mr Pauw has in the potential of the blind, and their right to full development. He uses every opportunity to present the blind person to the general public as “somebody with self-esteem and a citizen in his own right, entitled to be given fair and suitable opportunities to develop according to his own potential with a body, an intellect and an emotional life peculiar to himself”.

We now proceed to give an account of the contribution made by Mr Pauw to the educational and welfare aspects of services rendered to the visually handicapped. It is also fitting at this stage to consider his edu-

cational career before he joined the Worcester School for the Blind. In that early period he played a very active role in the field of ordinary provincial education, where he already showed qualities of leadership. The story of his youth is most interesting, and follows below.

Theodore Pauw was born on 1 July 1918 at Fort Jameson (now Chipata) in the former Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), the son of missionary parents from South Africa. He received his early education and instruction at home from his mother. At that time his father was stationed at Madzi Mayo, where there was no school which he could attend. His mother, who was a qualified teacher, also taught his three elder brothers. When Theo was in Std. 1, his father was transferred back to Fort Jameson where there was a small school.

The medium was English and his mother taught him Afrikaans (his home language) on Saturdays. He made such good progress at the little school and with his mother that when he was sent to the Hottentots Holland High School at Somerset West in South Africa, to begin at standard seven, he experienced no adaptation problems. At the mission station he enjoyed a carefree life as a child, and lived close to nature. At a certain stage he was more fluent in the language of the inhabitants, Chinyanya (now known as Chichewa), than in his own, Afrikaans. As the son of missionary parents his education at home was based on the Christian faith which left a lasting impression on him.<sup>15</sup>

After having passed the matriculation examination at the Hottentots Holland High School in Somerset West he enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch, where he obtained the degrees B.A., M.A. and M. Ed. (cum laude). He played a leading role in student affairs, and in 1941 was elected to the highest office in the student community, namely chairman of the Students' Council. In that same year he was elected head student of the men's residence, Wilgerhof. In 1940 he became the chairman of the University Debating Society.

After having completed his university studies he was appointed as a teacher at the Boys' High School at Paarl in 1942. Between 1950 and 1961 he was the principal of three schools, the last being the Hottentots Holland High School at Somerset West where he had been a pupil twenty years before. In 1961 he left to become Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind.

His teaching career was interrupted during the years 1952 and 1953 when he entered the Institute of Education of the University of London for further study.

During his period of service in the Cape Department of Education he played a leading role in the professional teachers' associations. From 1956 to 1957 he was the chairman of the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (S.A.O.U.) and at the same time Chairman of the Joint Council of the S.A.O.U. and the South African Teachers' Association. From 1960 to 1961 he was the Vice-Chairman of the Federal Council of Teachers' Associations in South Africa. He was also a member of the Departmental Examinations Committee of the Cape Department of Education for the period 1957 to 1961.

It is clear from the above information that he had distinguished himself in various fields of ordinary education, and there were many indications that he would continue to do so. Nevertheless he decided to change over to the education of the blind, and to put his talents at the disposal of blind children as well as blind adults. It is obvious that his interest was not confined to the education of the blind child, but that it very soon extended to include the well-being of blind adults. Although he had been appointed to the school in 1961, he did not attend the biennial meeting of the National Council in 1962. The reason for this was that the Worcester School for the Blind had no representation at that meeting of the National Council. The matter was rectified in the meantime, and Mr Pauw was a member of the school's delegation to the biennial meeting of the Council which was held in 1964. Already at this first meeting he attended he was elected as Vice-Chairman, and at the following meeting, held in 1966, as Chairman of Council. Thereafter he was continually re-elected and at present still occupies the chair.

The development which took place at the school during the period of Mr Pauw's principalship is described in the chapter on the history and activities of the affiliated bodies. There are a few matters in this connection, however, which must be mentioned at this stage, since they also concern the adult blind person and not only the pupil.

Firstly we should mention the introduction of the optacon, and electronic reading device which enables a blind person to read ordinary print. Mr Pauw, as the Principal of the School for the Blind, played a very important role in the acquisition of this instrument, and in the training for its use. The first optacon course in South Africa was conducted at the School by an instructress who had been engaged from overseas. Furthermore we can also state that the first training of blind programmers for computers in South Africa was introduced by the



Worcester School for the Blind in collaboration with the Cape College of Advanced Technical Education. Mr Pauw was the prime mover in this project.

It is certainly worthy of mention that the School was the first to approach the University of South Africa with the request to introduce a course for teachers of the blind, which resulted in the introduction of the Diploma in Specialised Education (D.S.E.). Mr Pauw has officiated as co-examiner since its inception.

In 1964 the School for the Blind convened the first South African Conference on the Education of the Blind and Partially Sighted. It was followed by similar conferences in 1966 at Worcester, 1969 in Pretoria at the Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted, 1971 at Worcester, and in 1975 once more in Pretoria.

A cause which was always near to his heart was the important role of the parents in the life of their blind child, and the necessity of close contact between parents and school. In this connection he developed "a system of contact meetings in various centres of the country, with the purpose of bringing together parents, past pupils and interested people from time to time and of making them personally acquainted with the developments and plans of the school, as well as its objectives with regard to the education of visually handicapped children, and the relationship between school, home and community".<sup>16</sup> In connection with this, accommodation is provided at the school where parents with pre-school children can stay when they come to visit the school and to make the acquaintance of the staff, even before the child is admitted.

Mr Pauw takes a special interest in the education of the deaf-blind, for whom there is a department at the school. He has made an intensive study of the subject, and has attended five international conferences in this connection. At some of these he delivered addresses. He is a member of the editorial committee of *The Educator*<sup>17</sup> and is responsible for a column on deaf-blindness.

Here follows a summary of his visits on behalf of the deaf-blind:

- 1968 — Conference at St Michelgestel School for the Deaf, Holland
- 1971 — Conference in Boston, U.S.A., where he was elected as a member of the Executive Committee of the international body
- 1974 — Conference at Shrewsbury, England, where he delivered an address

- 1976 — Conference in Sydney, Australia, where he delivered an address on guidance to parents
- 1977 — Helen Keller World Conference in New York, where he was appointed group leader and introducer of the subject: "Life skills, Basic Self-care, Mobility, Communication".

In the chapter on international relations of the National Council, mention has already been made of the overseas journeys which Mr Pauw has undertaken as a representative of the Council. With regard to purely educational matters, he attended four quinquennial conferences of the International Council for the Education of the Visually Handicapped (I.C.E.V.H.). These conferences were held respectively in Hanover (West Germany), Boston, Madrid and Paris. In 1967 he was elected as a member of the Executive Committee and since then has continued to serve in that capacity.

Mr Pauw's international activities and the role he plays in overseas conference halls has enhanced the image of South Africa in the sphere of special education and the welfare of the blind, which includes the prevention of blindness. Mr Pauw is held in high regard in many parts of the world and can therefore be considered a true ambassador for South Africa.

With regard to our own country, Mr Pauw serves on the boards of management of various bodies, and is a member of departmental and other committees. A list of these follows:

The Board of the South African Library for the Blind — since 1970

Interdepartmental Advisory Committee on Educational Services — since 1977

Committee for the Care of the Handicapped of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa — since 1976

Interdepartmental Committee for investigating the extension of Educational Opportunities to White Blind in South Africa and South West Africa (1969-1970)

Central Co-ordinating Council for the Provision of Literature to the Visually Handicapped (1968-1977).

As Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, he serves *ex officio* on all special committees of the Council. While head of the School for the Blind he officiated as the Secretary of its Board of Management.

After his appointment as Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind in 1961 he was granted leave to undertake an extensive study tour through Europe and America. Mrs Pauw accompanied him. On his return he wrote a comprehensive report which can be regarded as a comparative study of the education of the visually handicapped. It also serves as a guide to persons who intend going on an overseas study tour. This likewise applies to reports on his other visits to countries abroad.

In addition to his duties as principal of the School, Mr Pauw is also the Superintendent of the Workshop and Homes for the Blind, which were started on a modest scale by Dr P. E. Biesenbach and have since developed into an immense organization in the field of employment for the blind. The fact that the school and the workshop are both the responsibility of the Principal assures the pupil, who is destined for internal factory work, of a form of training at the school which will link up with the type of work he will do at the workshop. In this way the Principal becomes directly involved with the placement of the pupil in employment. This applies chiefly to those pupils who cannot be placed in the open labour market. With this in mind, the efforts which are made for the training and placement of the mentally retarded blind child should also be noted here. There is a well-equipped department for this purpose not only at the school, but also in the workshop itself. It appears that the numbers of this group are on the increase, and timely provision for them has become an urgent necessity.

As Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind Mr Pauw has always been impartial, fair and tolerant towards any member who wished to state his case. Nevertheless, his guidance from the chair is such that he will permit no digression from the subject under discussion, and in a subtle way will give direction to the debate.

He is fully bilingual, and is meticulous in ensuring that justice is done to both official languages. In the past he was sometimes faced with controversial matters and his tactful and unbiased handling of the situation and good insight generally enabled him to find a satisfactory solution.

Mr Pauw is a man of culture. He is interested in the arts and has a deep feeling for everything which is connected with the church and national matters. Mrs Pauw shares all his interests. She has a university degree in the sciences and has on various occasions assisted at the school, especially with regard to senior mathematics. As a couple they make an important contribution, not only in respect of the education of the blind child, but also in connection with a wide spectrum of mat-

ters of public interest.

A golden thread runs through the numerous pronouncements made by Mr Pauw in speeches over the years, namely the emphasis he lays on the dignity of man, whatever his handicap may be. One must look beyond the handicap in order to estimate the value of the real person — the person with his own potential. In conclusion we quote the following from an address delivered in Pretoria in 1978 at a conference on the handicapped child:<sup>18</sup>

“The accent has now shifted from the disability itself to the person with self-esteem. The trend to relegate people to a common level on account of a shared visual handicap is making way for the acknowledgement of the potential of the individual, especially by reason of the fact that, in spite of his visual handicap, he possesses valuable personal qualities. This should enable him to receive fair and reasonable opportunities to develop these assets fully in order to improve his prospects for living a full and satisfying life.” (Translated)

This was the basis of his educational thinking which he put into practice throughout his eighteen years of service as Principal of the Worcester School for the Blind. One can be assured that he will continue in this direction in the interests of the blind of the country, as member and Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

### **Miss Josie Wood**

Miss Josephine Ethel Wood was the first person to be elected Life President of the S.A. National Council for the Blind. It took place at a meeting of Council held on 24-25 September 1952 in Grahamstown. This outstanding honour was bestowed on her by reason of the fact that she was the founder and for many years the head of the S.A. Library for the Blind, and secondly for the leading role she played in regard to the founding of the S.A. National Council for the Blind in 1929.<sup>19</sup> For these reasons one will find her name frequently mentioned in this history in connection with matters pertaining to services to the blind even before the establishment of the Council.

If one encounters in life somebody who has served a cause with so much devotion and singularity of purpose until such an advanced age — in her 90th year she still filled her place in the Library — one is inclined to ask what was the spur, the incentive; and furthermore: Where did it begin? Here are a few facts.



Josephine Wood was born in Grahamstown on 22 January 1874, the daughter of George Samuel Wood, first Mayor of Grahamstown and a descendent of the 1820 British settlers. Her grandfather,<sup>20</sup> also George, who as a young man had an unhappy home life in England caused by his stepfather, decided to join the British settlers. He apprenticed himself to Richard Smith and arrived in Algoa Bay in the *Aurora*. Smith, however, was a cruel master and in the commotion which existed during the landing George slipped away on the beach. On account of the fact that he was not registered as a settler, he had no transport and was not entitled to receive any rations. Nobody will know how he managed to survive during the first few extremely difficult years, because George Wood never spoke about it, not even after he had become a successful and respected businessman<sup>21</sup> in Grahamstown and a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly. The only possession he brought with him and which is today kept as a precious heirloom is his father's "quizzing glass" (eye-glass).

Josie Wood was thus descended from hardy settler stock with perseverance and a sense of responsibility towards the community as their chief traits. No wonder that these same characteristics were inherited by her.

After Miss Wood had completed her school career at the Diocesan School for Girls in Grahamstown, she was trained as a teacher and started giving private instruction to a niece and a nephew in Johannesburg. In 1909 she left for England, where she travelled extensively. After her return she nursed invalids in her home and later assisted with child welfare. She continued with this until the influenza epidemic in 1918, when she met Miss Eleanor Comber. This meeting led to the establishment of the S.A. Library for the Blind, which has been dealt with in a previous chapter.

Characteristic of Miss Wood as librarian was her personal interest in each individual reader. Often it was left to her (and later to others of her staff) to send books according to the taste of the readers. Since it is a library which operates from a distance there was continual correspondence between her and the borrowers. In this way she got to know their interests. In connection with this correspondence we quote the following by the editor of *Imfama* in the issue of June 1965:

"Their letters to her were not perfunctory — they were to a friend, and that atmosphere between librarian and reader has permeated the entire staff of the library. The interest of Miss Wood and her

staff in the small affairs of a blind man they would never meet, was always manifest in the letter he received. If it was a harrassed student, a housewife seeking a recipe, a discursive rambling reader like your Editor, books, if not in Grahamstown, were procured from other sources overseas. Over it all lay the guiding genius of Josie Wood, quiet, kind and always intelligent and dedicated."

She not only supplied books to the ordinary reader, but took great trouble, as indicated above, to obtain literature for university students from overseas. This was generally from the Student's Library of the Royal National Institute for the Blind in London. In this manner she rendered valuable service to the older generation of blind students, such as Philip Schutte, later an attorney, John Tennant, the first blind man who obtained a B.A. degree in South Africa, and Walter Cohen. This was before the Worcester Braille Press was able to provide the necessary study material and before the magnetic tape had come into use.

She always attempted to provide books for her readers in the medium required. Besides the reading matter in braille, the Library had a fair collection of books in Moon type for older readers. When she learnt that the R.N.I.B. had started producing talking books she was immediately prepared to import these. This took place as early as 1936. These books, coming from the R.N.I.B., were naturally all in English. She was anxious that talking books should also be made available in Afrikaans. To achieve this she brought the matter before the Executive Committee and the Council on several occasions, but nobody would embark on such a huge undertaking with its enormous cost. As was her nature, this did not deter her, and when the present writer visited London in 1947 he had a request from Miss Wood to investigate the possibility of having Afrikaans books read on to master records in South Africa and then sent to the R.N.I.B. in London for processing and the production of copies. Unfortunately also this plan proved to be impracticable and the Afrikaans book had to wait until tape recording came into use.

It gave the Council great satisfaction to observe that Miss Wood's services were acknowledged outside the circle of blind welfare. In 1952 she received the degree of M.A. (*honoris causa*) from the University of Rhodes. In 1955 Rotary honoured her with the award of the Token of Esteem. In 1961 she was made Honorary Member of the S.A. Library

Association. In 1962 she received the freedom of the City of Grahamstown.

On all these occasions she was lauded for the outstanding services she rendered both to the blind of our country and to the community in general.

In 1963 the S.A. National Council for the Blind awarded her the R.W. Bowen Medal "for lifelong and meritorious service to the cause of the blind and the prevention of blindness". This award was introduced by resolution of the fifteenth meeting of the National Council, held in Cape Town in 1960. The first recipient was Miss Wood, a founder member of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

As far as her personal life was concerned, she was a lover of nature, especially of birds. She also did wood-carving and made sketches. The latter she sold for the benefit of the Library. She was a deeply religious person with a great love for the Cathedral which stands in the centre of Grahamstown. In this connection Miss Mary Spurling, who was very close to her and succeeded her as librarian, writes as follows:

"Her religion meant a great deal to her and she attended services in the Cathedral regularly and was a faithful supporter of the Prayer Circle . . . All her thoughts were for others and her sympathy for those in trouble was boundless and very practically expressed. Her wide interests, which included sketching and bird-watching, and her lively sense of fun made her a most stimulating companion."<sup>22</sup>

Miss Wood died in her 92nd year on 4 April 1965 in Grahamstown. In 1966 a memorial plaque was unveiled in the Library by Mrs M. Kruger on behalf of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization. It was in memory of the outstanding services rendered by Miss Wood to the blind of our land. The inscription reads as follows:

"This plaque commemorates the devoted services of Miss Josephine Ethel Wood to the blind of South Africa."

On 11 November 1966 the Josie Wood Wing of the Library was opened by Dr J.M. Hyslop, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Rhodes. It was erected in commemoration of the Founder and Honorary Secretary of the Library for 46 years, Josephine Ethel Wood. Mr Theo Pauw, chairman of the National Council and member of the Library Council, was also present and thanked the speaker.

The South African National Council for the Blind pays homage to the memory of Josephine Ethel Wood.

## Mr C.B. Anderson

After the death of Miss Josie Wood, Mr C.B. Anderson was elected President of the S.A. National Council for the Blind. The election took place at the 18th biennial meeting of the Council, which was held in Cape Town in October 1966. The leading role he played over many years in connection with the development of prevention services and his outstanding contribution in other spheres of welfare work for the blind made him a worthy successor to Miss Wood for this high honour.

Mr Anderson belongs to the – alas too small – group of successful businessmen who are prepared to give of their time and knowledge to welfare organizations and to play an active and leading role. We often find that individuals in such positions are willing to become members of welfare organizations, but in name only.

It is a different matter when they are prepared to commit themselves to promote the cause they have decided to serve. This Colin Anderson has been doing for the past thirty years, not only in respect of the prevention of blindness services but also with regard to a large organization, namely the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind, of which he was Chairman from 1948 to 1977. All these responsibilities he took upon himself while in the midst of an active life in the commercial and mining fields. Before we give a review of his activities in connection with the National Council and the blind, it will be interesting to know something about the man himself, his earlier life and his achievements.

Colin Bruce Anderson, born in 1909, is descended from a family who were for two generations involved in mining.<sup>23</sup> His grandfather was a mine manager and his father a managing director and deputy chairman of a large mining house. It was thus no wonder that the young Colin decided to study engineering. He obtained a degree in mechanical engineering at the University of Cambridge and then enrolled for further study at the McGill University in Canada. After the completion of his studies he worked there for a while as an ordinary worker in a mine for base metals.

In 1936 he joined Union Corporation Ltd., one of South Africa's largest mining companies, as a junior engineer, and worked his way up. In 1968 he became Managing Director of Union Corporation Ltd., and in 1972 chairman of the company. His involvement in mining and his outstanding ability must have been the reasons for his having been



appointed as Chairman of the Chamber of Mines at various times.

He took an interest in rowing and target-shooting. He was chairman of two rowing clubs on the Witwatersrand for a number of years and he was also at one time President of the Transvaal Schools Rowing Association. He often took rowing teams to compete in regattas in England and on the continent of Europe.

Mr Anderson is thus a man of varying interests. One stands amazed that he could accomplish so much and still have time left to devote to our work. This is all the more remarkable when one reads the following in the business section of a Johannesburg newspaper:

“Colin Anderson has developed the mining skills of Union Corporation so that it has become one of the most successful producers of gold and platinum in the world.”<sup>24</sup>

In the chapter on the history of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness we stated that Mr Anderson was elected as a member of the Bureau in 1948 and became its chairman in 1950. Thereafter he has been elected chairman ever since. In this connection we wrote:

“The fact that he has uninterruptedly acted as chairman up to the present has over the past 30 years brought stability and continuity to the activities of the Bureau. His influence and stature in society has enhanced the prestige of the Bureau as well as that of the Council.”

At the time of Mr Anderson's election as president, the Chairman of Council, Mr Theo Pauw, made mention of the high regard in which he is held both in South Africa and in the world. The following report comes from the minutes:

“He (the Chairman) expressed the Council's grateful thanks to Mr Anderson for the splendid way in which he had developed a very important part of its work, namely the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, stating that had it not been for Mr Anderson's inspiring leadership, the Bureau would not have reached the heights it had achieved.”

The history of the Bureau is also the history of the part he played in its development. In this connection it should also be mentioned that on many occasions he was called upon to lead deputations to the authorities in connection with awkward and difficult administrative and financial problems connected with the work of the Bureau. A case in point was the implications which arose following the establishment of the Homelands.

Further testimony to the manner in which Mr Anderson applied himself to work connected with the blind is his years of service to the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind. As chairman for more than thirty years he shaped its course until he retired in 1977. During this period extensive developments took place, the most important of these being the completion of the new building complex at Roseacre in 1967. To commemorate his leading role in the project it was decided that his name be given to the hostel and that it be called Colin Anderson House. In this connection it should also be mentioned that the Rehabilitation Centre of the National Council is situated on the same terrain and is administered by the Society in terms of an agreement between the two organizations.

It is impossible in this short space to do justice to the great work done by Colin Anderson on behalf of the National Council and the blind of our country. The spirit in which he performed it and the value he himself attached to it are reflected in his reply to the Chairman of Council when it was announced that he had been unanimously elected as president. The minutes<sup>25</sup> report the following:

"In reply Mr Anderson stated that his election as Life President of Council was the greatest honour he had yet received. He had been interested in blind welfare for many years, both with the Johannesburg Society and the Bureau, and had been connected with the Bureau for almost 20 years. He had found the work rewarding, and it had been extremely interesting to see the Bureau grow from nothing. He still had in his possession a telegram dated the 18th October 1952, sent to him by Dr E. Franks and Mr Wentworth, advising him that the first operation had been performed in the Mobile Unit, which had been a great milestone in the Council's affairs. Mr Anderson concluded by thanking the Chairman and the Council for the great honour bestowed upon him, and gave his assurance that he would do his best to be worthy of it."

It is encouraging for those who have been connected with the work for many years to learn from a man of the stature of Colin Anderson that his election as president of the S.A. National Council for the Blind meant so much to him. It serves as an inspiration to all of us who are involved with the rendering of services to the blind.

The R.W. Bowen Medal was awarded to him at a function held on 27 April 1976 in Pretoria. This is the highest honour which the

National Council can bestow on anyone. It symbolises the gratefulness of the Council for years of unselfish service. We conclude a few paragraphs from the citation:

“He has continued to serve and inspire our national endeavour towards the betterment of the quality of life for the visually handicapped of all sections of the community.

“His personal influence and unquestionable powers of leadership have been widely acknowledged in industry and in civic and social spheres, resulting in substantial benefit to the causes with which he has been associated.

“He has displayed these qualities in combination with a warm, human concern for the well-being of blind persons of every standing as individuals in their own right.”

## THE OFFICE OF VICE-PRESIDENT

At the biennial meeting of the National Council held in Grahams-town on 24 and 25 September 1952, certain amendments were made to the constitution whereby provision was made for the election of an honorary president and two vice-presidents.<sup>26</sup> At the same meeting Miss Josie Wood was elected as honorary president and Miss Marjorie Watson and Mr Hymy Matthews as honorary vice-presidents.

Since the introduction of the honorary office the National Council has had five vice-presidents. In 1960 Dr A.W. Blaxall was elected as third vice-president. When he left South Africa in 1964 he was not re-elected. After Miss Watson's death in 1965 she was succeeded by Mrs K. D. Battle. Mrs Battle was a very active worker in the service of the blind, as the secretary for many years of the Pretoria Society for Civilian Blind. She played an important role in the organization of the Rehabilitation Centre after its establishment. It was then still situated in Pretoria. She was also at one time a member of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. After her death in 1972 Mr A. McKellar White was elected. Mention has been made in a previous chapter of his valuable services to the Cape Town office for many years, especially in connection with financial matters relating to fund-raising.

### Mr Hymy Matthews

Mr Hymy Matthews has been connected with blindness and the S.A. National Council for the Blind for a very long time. He relates<sup>27</sup> how in

March 1936 Adv. Bowen, accompanied by his secretary, called at his home to enlist subscription members for the National Council. This was his first meeting with Adv. Bowen, and they had a long discussion about fund-raising in general. Then suddenly the idea of a golf competition entered his mind. He would start with his own club, Clovelly, near Cape Town, and he hoped that eventually clubs all over the country would become involved. This actually happened. An interesting sidelight connected with the matter was that when he was visiting Johannesburg a little while later he saw a beautiful trophy in a jeweller's shop. He at once knew that that was the trophy he was looking for and decided that the name should be the Trophy of Light. The following day he bought it and the manager kindly allowed him fifty percent discount after he had told him what lay behind the purchase.

Over the years, as has been told elsewhere in this book, large sums of money have been collected in this way for the benefit of the blind and the National Council. At present about fifty golf clubs throughout the country arrange competitions annually, each for its own trophy, mostly donated by the clubs themselves. The Trophy of Light competitions have been extended to other categories of sport such as bowls, tennis, soccer and yachting. Even a homing pigeon club in the Western Province has its annual Trophy of Light Competition.

As a result of his meeting with Adv. Bowen Mr Matthews joined the Board of Management of the Athlone School for the Blind in 1936. In 1964 he was honoured by being elected honorary vice-president and today still holds that office. He was also invited by Adv. Bowen to become a member of the National Council, although he never represented any affiliated society. In 1952 he was elected as vice-president of the National Council and still serves as such today.

As regards other activities and achievements we quote the following from his curriculum vitae which was presented to the National Council in April 1978:

"Founder Chairman of Helen Keller Hostel since 1956 and at present still in this position.

Joined the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society in 1937, served as Vice-President for a number of years and at present Life President and Chairman for the past four years.

Served on the Committee of the Athlone School for the Blind for many years and honoured as Honorary Vice-President for the past 15 years.



Honoured by the League of Friends of the Blind as Life Member for services rendered to the Coloured Community over a period of 40 years.

Made a Life Member of the Swaziland Society for the Blind and Handicapped.”

Mr Matthews was a business man in Cape Town for many years and as such built up many contacts, whereby he was able to obtain funds for organizations for the blind.

For services rendered to the blind in different spheres of activity, the National Council has decided to award the R. W. Bowen Medal to him on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebrations in November 1979.

### **Miss M. T. Watson**

Marjorie Tennant Watson, herself a blind person, belonged to a group of Cape pioneer workers (all women) who started welfare work amongst the blind in the Cape Peninsula at about the time of the establishment of the national Council in 1929. Some of the others were Lil Bowen, Lilian Butler-Smith, Vera Chamberlain, Lennox Rawbone and Ailie Gillies. It may be said that Marjorie Watson and Lil Bowen were the leading figures in this venture. They established a committee in 1928 from which emanated the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society. In later years Miss Watson also initiated the establishment of the Helen Keller Hostel for elderly blind women in Cape Town. She laid the cornerstone of the building on 16 November 1957. A third project which can be ascribed to her initiative was the Lighthouse Club for the Blind, which she brought into being with the assistance of a few other interested persons.

Each of the above organizations had its own special beginning. In her memoirs,<sup>28</sup> which she published in book form, she writes:

“One day in May 1928, I received a phone call from Lil Bowen asking if I would like to join her in starting a little society for the benefit of a number of blind persons whom she had discovered living in seclusion in the Peninsula.”

A meeting of interested persons under the guidance of Miss Watson and Mrs Bowen was held in September 1928. This was the beginning of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society.

In connection with the establishment of the Helen Keller Hostel, we quote the following from her memoirs:

“At one time I was beginning to despair of ever achieving this objective, when out of the blue came an offer of Mr Hymy Matthews, who had so long interested himself in collecting funds through his trophy of light golf competition. Now he was prepared to form a fund-raising committee for the Helen Keller Hostel for Blind Women.”

During her whole life she devoted herself to serving the blind, especially through these two organizations.

She was an expert brailist and transcribed a number of books for the S.A. Library for the Blind in Grahamstown. She also did proof-reading for the Library.

In 1949 she was elected Honorary Life President of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society and later also Life President of the Lighthouse Club for the Blind.

In *Kindly Light*, which was sold in aid of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness and the Lighthouse Club, she describes the years of her youth, her life in Cape Town at the beginning of the century, her gradual loss of sight, resulting eventually in total blindness, her activities in connection with blind welfare work and the establishment of the different societies. Eric Rosenthal, the well-known historian and writer, expresses himself as follows in his introduction to the book:

“Her simple straightforward style is all the more impressive, and South Africans will enjoy the glimpses Miss Watson gives of a vanished Victorian and Edwardian Cape Town, in which her family, associated with the famous old firm of Thomson, Watson and Co., for generations played a prominent part.”

Marjorie Mabel Tennant Watson was born in 1888 in Wynberg in the Cape Peninsula. She was a descendant of the small group of British settlers who established themselves in Cape Town. Her grandfather was a Member of the old Cape Parliament and was interested in astronomy. He was a member of the Royal Astronomical Society and at one time received an award for his discovery of a new star. Her father was a Government Land Surveyor.

Marjorie Watson was born with a progressive eye defect with the result that at the age of 27 she was totally blind. She paid frequent visits to eye specialists here and in England, but without success. In spite of her blindness she lived a very active social life in Cape Town and could be considered a completely rehabilitated blind person. As already stated she was actively engaged in welfare work for the blind. She was a

deeply religious person who was ever willing to help a deserving cause. She died on 22 June 1965 at the age of 77.

## DIRECTORS FROM 1961

### Mr S. K. Wentworth

After the death of the general secretary,<sup>29</sup> Mr D. J. van Wyk, in 1961, Mr S. K. Wentworth was appointed to the post. Although he served the National Council as Director for more than eleven years in a very efficient manner, he will probably be remembered rather as head of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, a post he previously held for more than fifteen years. Here he was set the task of building up an organization from the very beginning which was the only one of its kind, and for which no previous model existed.

In chapter 11 the story of the Bureau has already been told. It is possible that his participation in the initial stages of the project has not been sufficiently stressed. To start the project his first task was to recruit professional and other staff. It was required of him to make the necessary contacts on all levels. After that he had to obtain financial aid, and for this he had to convince people in all spheres of the merits of his cause and the necessity of the scheme. When he actually started on it, he had to plan routes through veld and bush, study the elements and mobilise his resources to induce people under the most primitive conditions to come to the field clinics held under the trees in the open. He had to contend with physical hardships, lend a hand to push vehicles through swollen rivers (and in the process once contracted bilharzia), travel along almost impassable roads, and then also conduct interviews with chiefs in their kraals to persuade them to co-operate. In this way he strove to break down prejudices and to carry out what may be called a process of civilization. Above all he had to keep his faith in his cause and to carry it over to the authorities and the professions. This and much more was the task of one man: Stephen King Wentworth, in the initial stages of the scheme.

Without fear of contradiction it may be said that the success of the Bureau was also his success. He laid the foundation of a project which still bears the fruit of his insight and determination.

S. K. Wentworth was born in the Orange Free State and later took a post in the auditor's section of the Transvaal Provincial Administra-

tion. The experience he gained there stood him in good stead when he was faced with the financial affairs of the Council. At the outbreak of the Second World War he enlisted in the South African Air Force and attained the rank of lieutenant. He saw service in North Africa. He had the ability to establish good relationships easily. This is proved by the fact that he was appointed to assist with the rehabilitation of returned soldiers after the war. It was as a result of this that he met Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, who was chief of the demobilisation service, which led to his appointment as head of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. He assumed duty with the National Council on 16 January 1946. As its Director he distinguished himself both as a capable official and a champion of the cause of the blind.

In 1964, with Dr W. Cohen, he represented the National Council at a conference of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (W.C.W.B.) in New York. By reason of his intimate knowledge of the prevention of blindness he was appointed to the Committee for the Prevention of Blindness of the W.C.W.B.

A notable facet of his life was his interest in civic and municipal affairs. In this sphere he rendered service first as town councillor and later as mayor of Verwoerdburg. By reason of this he was appointed to act on a number of committees and in this way served his community.

On reaching the age of retirement he decided to leave the service of the Council on 30 June 1972. On account of his extensive knowledge and experience of the work of the Council, the Executive Committee decided to appoint him in a consultative capacity from 1 July. In this way he would be able to be of assistance to his successor. However, he died suddenly on 10 August 1972, less than six weeks after his retirement.

Tokens of appreciation for his services to the National Council and to the blind of all population groups came from all quarters. We quote the following from a tribute paid to him by the S.A. Blind Workers Organization:<sup>30</sup>

"It can truly be said that he was a worthy sighted ambassador for the blind of his country. The S.A. Blind Workers Organization wishes to pay tribute to the memory of a great man, who dedicated his life to the cause of the blind."

The R. W. Bowen Medal was awarded to him posthumously on 17 April 1973. It was presented to Mrs Joy Wentworth at a function organised by the National Council.



After Mr Wentworth's retirement, Mr A. Mardon succeeded him on 1 July 1972. It was arranged that Mr Wentworth should remain in service in an advisory capacity so that the new incumbent of the post could benefit from his knowledge and experience. His sudden death prevented this.

Mr Mardon occupied the post for just over three years and left the service of the Council on 31 October 1975. During his period of service he acquainted himself with the multifarious facets of the activities of the Council and by visiting affiliated societies was able to gain intimate knowledge of their affairs. During his leave in July 1974 he visited several organizations and persons in Rhodesia and made valuable contacts. In bidding farewell to him in the biennial report of 1974-1976, the Chairman of Council touched on his devotion to service and ended as follows:

"I wish to place on record our thanks and appreciation for the devoted service he rendered during this period. He made many friends in all sections of the community which he came to know in the execution of his duties and he is assured of our best wishes for the future."

### **Mr W. P. Rowland**

Mr W. P. Rowland assumed duty as director of the S.A. National Council for the Blind on 1 January 1976. He was the first blind person to occupy the post.

In connection with his appointment the Chairman of Council wrote as follows in the 23rd biennial report: "The Executive Committee had no hesitation in appointing him in the post of Director from a very competitive panel of applicants and he soon established himself as an expert in his new role". Before this, from 1966 to 1974, he occupied the post of Public Relations Officer of the Council with head office in Cape Town. In this capacity he received a good grounding in all aspects of Council's work and in the different systems of the rendering of services to the blind in this country. We have already dealt with the public relations aspect of the Council, and the role played by Mr Rowland, in a previous chapter. We may add that his eight years as Public Relations officer served as a period of preparation for the important task which awaited him as Director. It can undoubtedly be asserted that his outstanding intellect, as shown by his brilliant school and aca-

demic achievements, must also be seen as a contributing factor to a successful career.

William Peter Rowland was born at Sea Point, Cape Town, in 1940. He was blinded in a shooting accident at the age of four. He attended the Worcester School for the Blind and in 1958 passed the National Senior Certificate with the highest marks nation-wide in both English and Afrikaans. In 1959 he left for England to study physiotherapy at the Royal National Institute for the Blind. After his return he worked from 1962 to 1966 in a children's hospital as a physiotherapist and was also in private practice. As was previously mentioned, he occupied the post of Public Relations Officer from 1966 until his appointment as Director of the National Council from the beginning of 1976.

In the meantime he enrolled as a student at the University of South Africa and obtained the degrees B.A. (with distinction), B.A. Hons. (with distinction) and M.A. (with distinction) on a dissertation entitled "Space and Blindness — A Philosophical Study". An exceptional achievement should be mentioned here namely an award from a publishing house for the best student of Afrikaans for the year 1968 at the University of South Africa. This is all the more noteworthy seeing that his home language was English.

As Director of the National Council his first aim was to become thoroughly acquainted with all aspects of welfare work for the blind in the Republic, South West Africa and the neighbouring states. This included visits to affiliated societies, where he was able to assist with problems which had arisen. On certain occasions he was requested to appear as a speaker. He reported to the Executive Committee on all these matters.

With regard to the work of the Council, he especially concerned himself with the activities of the special committees. He considered the rehabilitation of the newly blinded an important priority, and therefore was deeply interested in the Rehabilitation Centre. With regard to employment he showed special interest in the training of computer programmers. In order to develop this it was necessary to conduct several interviews with firms and other organizations. His negotiations in connection with the financing of the various ophthalmological tours of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, as well as the obtaining of land for the new headquarters of Council, should also be mentioned. The study he made of recent legislation in connection with welfare work and his action thereafter showed rare insight. The abovementioned

tioned matters, and many more, generally necessitated interviews with state departments, local authorities, heads of commercial firms, chairmen of various organizations and others. In this way he made his services available to the Council and the blind. His expert knowledge of every branch of the Council's work, as well as his persuasive ability, generally brought the necessary results. To this must be added his assistance to individuals, especially newly blinded persons in whose special problems he took a deep interest.

On account of his wide contacts in connection with welfare work, he serves on fairly divergent bodies. He is a member of the S.A. Federal Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, Trustee of the Eyebank Foundation, member of the Northern Transvaal Regional Welfare Board, member of the Executive Committee of the National Association of Blind Bowlers and member of the Public Relations Institute of South Africa. He is an initiator of the Touch Gallery in Cape Town and adviser to the S.A. National Gallery on art for the blind. He is also the initiator of In Touch (a radio programme for blind listeners).

In 1972 he undertook an extended oversea study tour to America, Canada and Europe, during which he also attended the conference of the International Council for the Education of the Visually Handicapped (I.C.E.V.H.) in Madrid. The report which he presented after his return contains valuable information on new developments in connection with practically every facet of services to the blind. In 1978 he represented the National Council at a conference of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (I.A.P.B.) held in Oxford, England. After the conference he undertook a study tour of six countries, which included Iran and Kenya.

A contribution of a special nature which he made lately, and with which he should continue, is the delivering of addresses on different occasions on aspects of blindness. The following three subjects may be mentioned:

*The Attitude of the Public towards Blindness*

*The Blind as unknown to us*

*Some Effects of Blindness*

His academic study, which included research into spatial problems for the blind, his knowledge of the blind person and his own experience of being blind place him in a unique position to write on blindness. We should like to see him as one of the all too few writers on blindness who are themselves blind. It is a fact that by far the majority

of writers of international repute today who write on blindness are sighted.

William Rowland is a versatile person. He is a creditable chess player, has won a gold medal for bowls, has taken part in water skiing and takes an interest in sport for the blind. He is a published poet with poems in literary magazines, in two major Afrikaans anthologies and a personal volume entitled: *Die huis waar ek woon* (*The house where I live*). This has had a good reception from literary critics. He also writes children's stories and is the composer of songs, some of which have been performed on the radio. He has written articles on art published in South Africa, England, France and the U.S.A. As a result of his achievements he was one of the recipients of the "Four Outstanding Young South Africans (FOYSA) Award" of Jaycees in 1975.

To conclude one may say that his period as Director can be described as one of renewal. He is continually seeking new aids (electronic and others) for the blind, firstly to make living more pleasant, secondly for the more effective execution of their work and thirdly for exploiting new avenues of employment such as programming. There is also a marked renewal in thought perceivable. He especially stresses the use of the full potential of the blind person, and as an outcome of this, his integration in the community in different spheres but especially in the administrative and professional fields. William Rowland is a new voice in work for the blind.

## THE OFFICE OF HONORARY TREASURER

When the S.A. National Council for the Blind was established in 1929 the organising secretary at the time, Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith, also performed the role of treasurer. The first honorary treasurer was elected at the fourth biennial meeting of the Council, held in 1937. He was Mr H. A. Tothill, a representative of the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind and a Member of Parliament for a Witwatersrand constituency. The head-office of the Council was still in Cape Town. He served as honorary treasurer until the biennial meeting of 1946, when Mr D. N. Murray was elected to succeed him. Mr Murray was also a representative of the Johannesburg Society, and head of the social services of the Johannesburg Municipality. After fourteen years of service to the Council he was replaced by Mr F. A. Peters, who was unanimously elected honorary treasurer at the fifteenth biennial meeting of the Council, held on 19-21 October 1960. Mr Peters has since



been re-elected at every meeting. In actual fact the Council has had only three honorary treasurers in the fifty years of its existence.

### **Mr F. A. Peters**

Mr F. A. Peters, as a result of his acquaintance with Mr S. K. Wentworth, generously consented to accept election as honorary treasurer of the National Council. As this happened in 1960, nineteen years ago, he is at present the office bearer with the longest uninterrupted service. At the time Mr Wentworth was on the point of being promoted to the post of general secretary of the Council, and had enough insight to realise that the Council needed an expert on financial matters. It has previously been mentioned that extensive developments were taking place at that time and it was imperative that a person be appointed who was able to formulate a sound financial policy for the Council. The latter was fortunate to obtain such a person in Fred Peters. On presenting his report at the very first meeting of the Executive Committee after his election he was commended for his clear exposition of the financial affairs of the Council. This happened each time when he delivered his report.

It is easily understandable that in keeping a watchful eye on the income and expenditure, it would be expected of him to become thoroughly acquainted with the activities of the Council, in order to determine whether the expense to be incurred on a particular project was justified. It was therefore not only a question of bookkeeping. When he was later appointed chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee his good judgement was recognised, for on many occasions matters were referred to him for determining to what extent funds should be made available. Although he kept the reins fairly tight he never allowed essential developments to be curtailed by holding back funds. Council could always rely on his good judgement. In this respect he is a very valuable honorary officer of Council. It should be added that the slightest semblance of an irregularity never evaded him and he acted immediately in such cases.

He is also chairman of the Dagbestuur (emergency committee), which is often required to make quick decisions. Here too members of the Executive Committee can always rely on his well-balanced judgement.

An important part of his task, as a member of the sub-committee dealing with staff matters, is the proper evaluation of the various posts

on the establishment and the matching of the salaries of the incumbents accordingly. This he performs with fairness and insight.

The fact that he is so intensely concerned about the financial affairs of the Council often results in frequent visits to the office. This duty he performed while holding a very responsible post on the staff of the Dairy Board until his retirement. In this connection it should also be recorded that he rendered invaluable service to the Council in directing the office during the period when the post of Director was vacant, from November to December 1975, and some time thereafter.

Mr Peters must be commended for the devoted and expert service he has rendered to the National Council, and therefore to the blind of our country, for the past nineteen years. The hope is expressed that this will continue for a long time to come.

1. According to his Curriculum Vitae, dated 17 November 1960, the following orders of merit were awarded to him: "Holder of the Royal Red Cross of Yugoslavia, Member of the Serbian Order of St. Sava, Brother of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem."
2. Ga-Rankuwa is now situated in the Republic of Bophuthatswana.
3. Mocke, H. A.: *The History of the Education of Bantu Deaf in South Africa* (Translated). Thesis for obtaining the degree Ph.D. of the University of Pretoria, 1971. The data on the establishment of the school were obtained from an article which had appeared in a newspaper, The Star, on 30 March 1960.
4. All these data with regard to his academic career and his earlier teaching experience were obtained from the 38th Annual Report (1964-65) of the Athlone School for the Blind, page 21.
5. Minutes of the eleventh biennial meeting of the National Council, held 24 and 25 September 1952, page 14.
6. October 1968.
7. Imfama, Volume 8, no. 11.
8. Biennial Report 1964-1966, page 14.
9. The rest of the delegation included names which are of historical importance: Ds C. B. Brink, who was at one time the Moderator of the Synod of the N.G. Church in the Transvaal, Dr P. Boshoff, the first ophthalmologist to attend a biennial meeting of the Council, and the Rev. and Mrs A. W. Blaxall, well-known pioneers in the field of services to the blind.
10. An awl-like instrument used for writing braille.
11. This is an extremely slow and time-consuming process. Today braille is usually written by means of a machine at a speed which compares favourably with that of a typewriter.
12. Committee appointed to deal with urgent matters.
13. Seventeenth biennial report of the National Council (1962-1964).
14. "Children of Darkness".
15. The above information was supplied by Mr Pauw in a letter to the writer. It contains many more interesting facts concerning the life of the missionaries and their children in Central Africa at that time.
16. Annual report of the Worcester School for the Blind - 1978.
17. Journal of the International Council for the Education of the Visually Handicapped.
18. *New Developments in the Education of the Blind*: An address delivered at a symposium on Aid to children with Learning Disabilities held in Pretoria in 1978.
19. In the 12th biennial report of the Council (1952-1954) Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, Chairman at the time, called Miss Josie Wood the "primum movens" of the founding of the National Council.
20. This information about Miss Wood's grandfather was obtained from a S.A.B.C. broadcast on Miss Wood by Mrs Rivett-Carnac on 29 October 1966. The manuscript is in the possession of Miss Mary Spurling of the S.A. Library for the Blind.

- <sup>21</sup> In a S.A.B.C. broadcast (about 1959) Richard Buncher said that Miss Wood's grandfather also traded in wool and hides. The Library is housed in the same building (since renovated and considerably altered) which served as his warehouse. The manuscript of the broadcast is in the possession of Miss Mary Spurling of Grahamstown.
- <sup>22</sup> Newsletter, Grahamstown Diocese, June 1965: Josephine Ethel Wood, by M. Spurling.
- <sup>23</sup> These facts about the life history of Mr Anderson have been taken from an article in the *Sunday Times* of 4 November 1973. Under the heading "How they made it to the top" we find sketches of leading businessmen who reached the top of their vocation. Colin Anderson was one of them.
- <sup>24</sup> *Sunday Times*: 4 November 1973.
- <sup>25</sup> Meeting of Council held 26-28 October 1966.
- <sup>26</sup> Minutes of eleventh biennial meeting of Council, 24-25 September 1952, page 11, paragraph 9. The word "honorary" was later omitted.
- <sup>27</sup> The information which is contained in this section was supplied by Mr Matthews at an interview with the writer on 23 October 1978.
- <sup>28</sup> *Kindly Light* by Marjorie Tennant Watson, 1958, page 36.
- <sup>29</sup> In 1964 the name was changed to Director.
- <sup>30</sup> Minutes of biennial meeting of the National council, held 25-27 October 1972, page 26.

## CHAPTER 14

### *AFFILIATED AND ASSOCIATED BODIES*

Membership of the S.A. National Council for the Blind consists of

- (i) affiliated bodies
- (ii) associated bodies
- (iii) special members.

The constitution also makes provision for representation of certain State Departments on the Council, namely those which are concerned with its activities.

In connection with affiliation, the constitution stipulates that “any properly constituted body existing solely for the welfare of blind people may be granted affiliation to the Council”. Any organization which among other functions, concerns itself with the welfare of blind people may be granted associate membership of the Council.<sup>1</sup> The number of representatives which each affiliated body may send to Council meetings is determined by the annual income of such an organization. The number varies from two to five. The associated bodies have one representative each. The special members, of whom there are seven, are elected “on the ground of their special knowledge of, or interest in blindness and blind people”.<sup>2</sup>

As the provision of services to the blind expanded the number of affiliated and associated members increased. At the foundation meeting of the Council in 1929, representatives of seven organizations which would today be defined as affiliated bodies, and nine representatives of associated bodies, were present. Today 35 organizations are affiliated to the Council and 35 have associate membership. The total number is 70. A fully attended meeting will therefore consist of more than 150 persons. At the biennial meeting of the Council held in October 1976, 91 representatives attended.

The affiliated societies form the backbone of services to the visually



handicapped on local, provincial, and in certain instances, on national level. Attempting to do justice to the important work performed by each one on its own terrain, is a well-nigh impossible task. When studying the records of the various organizations at head-office and at societies, or merely reading the records which appear in the biennial reports of the Council, one is amazed at the comprehensiveness of the work which has been accomplished already, and is still being performed. It was indeed not the intention that a detailed account of the activities of each affiliated organization should be given in this work. The purpose of the book is to record the history of the National Council itself. Nevertheless it was decided that it would be appropriate to include a brief account of each of the organizations which has a reasonably large programme of services, and which has been in the field for a long time. The history of the various affiliated bodies is very absorbing and deserves further attention, but will demand a much more comprehensive study to do justice to it.

Firstly a list of organizations which are affiliated to the Council will be given. It will be followed by the names of the bodies which have acquired associate membership. In connection with the affiliated bodies, it must be mentioned that several of those which were formed in the initial years of the Council's existence have since been dissolved. They were societies for the blind which had been established in smaller centres, or in areas which are situated too near existing societies. They are the following: Brakpan, Graaff-Reinet, Oudtshoorn, Bellville-Durbanville and Stellenbosch. At times efforts were made to revive some of them, but without success. Studying the records, one comes to the conclusion that the main reason for their dissolution was the fact that there were too few blind persons who needed services in the immediate vicinity. A society which did very good work until quite recently, was that at Stellenbosch.

The names of the bodies which are affiliated to the National Council, appear below in alphabetical order:

Athlone School for the Blind, Bellville South

Beacon Club for the Blind, Cape Town

Bosele School for the Blind, Mpudulle, Tvl

Cape Town Civilian Blind Society, Cape Town

Civilian Blind Society of the O.F.S., Bloemfontein

East London Society for the Civilian Blind, East London

Everest Club for the Visually Handicapped, Port Elizabeth

Goldfields (O.F.S.) Society for the Blind, Welkom  
 Grahamstown Civilian Blind Society, Grahamstown  
 Kimberley and Northern Cape Civilian Blind Society, Kimberley  
 King William's Town Society for Civilian Blind, King William's  
 Town  
 League of Friends of the Blind, Athlone, Cape Town  
 Lighthouse Club for the Blind, Cape Town  
 Mobility Association of South Africa, Benmore, Johannesburg  
 Natal Bantu Blind Society, Durban  
 Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association, Durban  
 Natal Indian Blind and Deaf Society, Durban  
 New Horizon School for the Blind, Pietermaritzburg  
 Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind, Port Elizabeth  
 Pretoria Society for the Blind, Pretoria  
 Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted and Preparatory School for  
 the Blind, Pretoria  
 Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, Johannesburg  
 School for the Blind, Worcester  
 Siloe School for the Blind, Pietersburg  
 Society to Help Civilian Blind, Johannesburg  
 South African Blind Workers Organization, Johannesburg  
 South African Guide-Dogs Association for the Blind, Benmore, Jo-  
 hannesburg  
 South African Library for the Blind, Grahamstown  
 Tape Aids for the Blind, Durban  
 Transvaal Association for Blind Black Adults, Orlando, Johannes-  
 burg  
 Transvaal Bantu Blind Society, Ga-Rankuwa, Bophuthatswana  
 Transvaal Indian Blind Association, Johannesburg  
 Transvaal Parents Association of the School for the Blind, Worces-  
 ter, Pretoria  
 Vuleka School for Blind and Deaf Zulu Children, Nkandla, KwaZulu  
 Workshop and Homes for the Blind, Worcester.

As a result of the diversity of objectives and activities of the organiza-  
 tions, they can be classified in different ways. In the first place there are  
 some which control workshops, others which concentrate exclusively  
 on welfare services, and still others which, in the midst of their activi-  
 ties, also devote considerable attention to the prevention of blindness.  
 For our purpose, namely to review the events surrounding the estab-

lishment and growth of the organizations, they can be divided into three groups. The first group consist of bodies which operate throughout the country, and therefore serve the blind of the whole Republic. The second group includes the educational institutions which concentrate on the education of the child. The third group makes up the rest, namely those organizations which provide services to the adult blind, chiefly on a provincial and regional level.

The organizations which belong to the first group and operate on a national level, are the following:

- The S.A. Library for the Blind
- The S.A. Blind Workers Organization
- The League of Friends of the Blind
- The S.A. Guide-Dogs Association
- Tape Aids for the Blind.

### **The South African Library for the Blind**

Because the S.A. Library for the Blind came into existence during the period prior to the establishment of the National Council, attention has already been focused on its initial years in a previous chapter.<sup>3</sup> Additional reference to the Library was also made in a review of the life and work of Miss Josie Wood<sup>4</sup>, who was its founder in 1919. In the chapter mention was made of the important part played by the Library in the lives of many blind people. It behoves us therefore to continue the story of the Library,<sup>5</sup> and to indicate to what extent, after essential developments had taken place, it has become an indispensable part of the lives of blind readers and students.

Reading Miss Wood's reports on the Library which appeared in the biennial reports of the Council, one becomes aware of a sustained growth from the time when her first report was published in 1932.

In those years there were still blind people who could not read braille. Consequently the Library introduced a correspondence course in braille to assist them. To give an idea of what the library was able to achieve as early as 1932, we quote the following from the report of that year:

"We have bought books of all sorts, including those on religion, history, biography, poetry, massage, science, a good deal of fiction and some juvenile literature. By special request, we have Esperanto in which several readers are interested. We have added a great deal of music and music literature, most of it chosen by our

organists and teachers. Works for examinations and concert performance are included."

In the report of 1934 to the National Council it was stated that "the number of volumes<sup>6</sup> on the shelves at the end of 1934 was 5 292 and nearly all our available space is filled up." The number of readers was approximately 200. This stock of books increased considerably over the years, with the result that the Director of the Library could state the following in the report which he submitted to the National Council in 1979:

"The present stock of braille books exceeds 7 600 titles in over 28 000 volumes. Of the latter the voluntary braille transcribers have contributed more than 630 volumes during the three years under review . . . In the three year period an average of well over 500 readers per annum were served."

The largest number of books in stock are in English, in contrast with those in Afrikaans, the reason being that English books are more easily obtainable from overseas. The books in Afrikaans have to be produced locally, and are very expensive in comparison with those in English, since a very small number of copies are needed. As Braille Services<sup>7</sup> expands we are confident that this situation will improve. According to statistics supplied by the Library in 1976, the position of stocks was as follows:

English	4 606 titles (books)
Afrikaans	942 titles
Black languages	179 titles
Total	5 727 titles

In 1936 a major development took place with regard to the provision of reading-matter for the blind by the Library. In that year the so-called talking books were imported from England. Books were sound-recorded on records which were then played back. This medium brought about a radical change in the reading pattern of, and the provision of information to the blind. The new method could produce reading-matter more quickly and more cheaply than the previous methods. When the record was replaced by the magnetic tape, the advantages of this system proved to be even greater. Some people believed that books on tape would supersede those in braille, and make them superfluous. This, however, was not the case, and at the present time it is universally accepted that the sound medium is supplementary to the touch medium, namely braille. There are numerous blind readers



today who prefer braille to tape for diverse reasons. In connection with the tape department at the Library the Director reports as follows (1979):

“The collection of books on tape has grown to nearly 3 000 titles and over 18 000 cassettes, from four to eight copies being held of each title to satisfy the circulation demand. Over the past three years an average of 1 100 readers per annum were supplied with a yearly average of over 5 300 cassette books. The circulation staff have performed admirably to cope with the pressure of daily demand on the principle of “in today, out today”. In addition to the normal stock, there are 220 special titles purchased to help students.”

With regard to another reading medium, namely Moon<sup>8</sup> which is specially suitable for elderly people, the Director states in the same report that the Library has 4 300 volumes in stock, which represent 1 200 titles. The Library offers lessons by means of correspondence for the study of this reading medium.

After the death of Miss Josie Wood in 1965 Miss E. M. Spurling was appointed in her place as “honorary secretary and librarian”.<sup>9</sup> Mary Spurling, an Oxford M.A. in Economics and French, was a member of the Library staff since 1950. She was Miss Wood’s right hand for many years. She had also studied social work in England and on her return to South Africa in 1938, she joined the staff of the Child Welfare Society as a social worker. It may be of interest to know that she was elected a member of the Library Board in 1945, and five years later was appointed on the staff.

In 1968 the Library became a state subsidised institution and since then receives financial assistance in accordance with an established formula. A further change took place when a post of director was created as from 1 April 1968. This person would be at the head of the Library. Miss Spurling did not wish to be promoted to this position, and Mr D. E. Schauder was appointed Director from 1 March 1969. Miss Spurling was appointed head librarian.

During Mr Schauder’s term of office the question was raised as to the advisability of decentralising the library services by establishing depots in large centres. It was decided, however, that this arrangement would be unsatisfactory, since the blind reader, wherever he might find himself, would find it more convenient to receive his books through the post.

Mr Schaunder undertook an overseas study tour during the first half of 1971. In 1972 he received an M.A. degree from the University of Sheffield, England, with a dissertation on: 'Libraries for the Blind: A comparative study of policies and practices'.<sup>10</sup>

Mr Schaunder resigned as Director in 1973, and Mr P. J. A. de Villiers was appointed in his place. He assumed office in 1974.

In September 1977 Mr De Villiers attended the congress of the I.F.L.A. (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) in Brussels. Special meetings for librarians of libraries for the blind were arranged within the framework of the congress. Addresses were delivered on matters concerning library services to the blind. A working group was formed to investigate certain aspects of the matter. In this connection the Director reports as follows:<sup>11</sup>

"This working group has now been officially recognised by the I.F.L.A. executive, and the groundwork is being done for the eventual construction of a system which will tremendously benefit blind people, especially students, by making international exchange of materials among Libraries for the Blind an easy process."

With regard to international contacts made by the library, it can be mentioned that Mr De Villiers was appointed to a sub-committee for "Library Services to the Blind", which was established by the Cultural Affairs Committee of the World Council for the Blind.

Although Miss Spurling had informed the writer that she had retired in 1976, we find her name entered as head librarian in the annual report of the Library for the financial year 1977-1978. It therefore appears that she is reluctant to detach herself from the Library.

We conclude with two important quotations from the most recent available report of the Library (1 April 1977 to 31 March 1978). In his introduction the Director makes the following important statement:

"It is today regarded as axiomatic that visually handicapped citizens are as much entitled to library services as any other section of the community."

In the same vein, he continues in a later paragraph as follows:

"The Department of National Education provides the South African Library for the Blind with a grant to cover basic administrative expenses but the Library relies heavily on the generous contributions of individual friends, on legacies, on donations from local authorities and organizations, and on the efforts of volun-

tary service organizations, to maintain an adequate rate of expansion of the book stock and other services."

The financial position of the Library has not been taken into account in this review. From the above, however, it is clear that, in comparison with library services for the sighted, the Library still has to depend heavily on the benevolence of the private sector in order to maintain its services. The Department of National Education is well aware of the problems with which the Library has to contend and also recognises its valuable work. For this reason an advisory committee has been appointed to advise the Department on these matters.

### **The South African Blind Workers Organization**

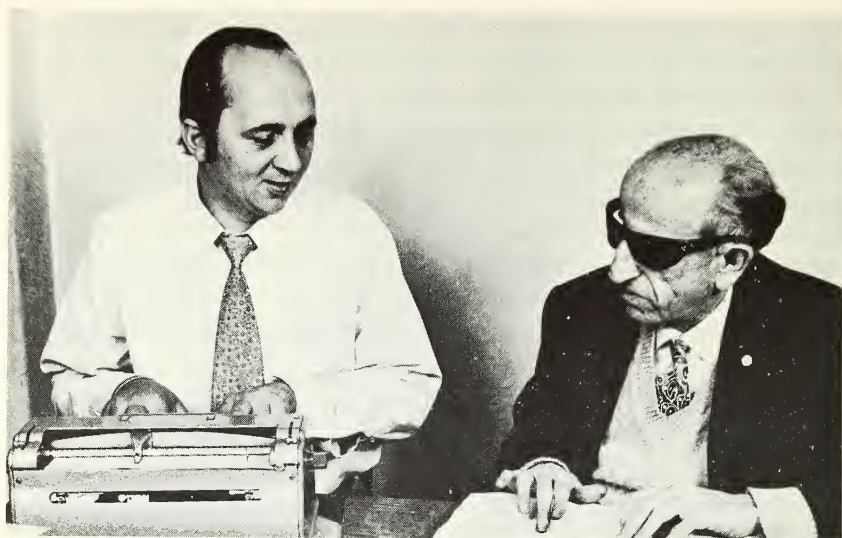
The South African Blind Workers Organization was established in Johannesburg on 26 October 1946. It resulted from a strong movement which originated amongst the workers of the Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind, to unite their resources in order to obtain a better dispensation for the blind in general, especially with regard to employment in open labour. In an article which appeared in the Jubilee memorial issue of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization, published at the time of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1971, Mr A. J. C. Schwartz<sup>12</sup> states their case as follows:

"Even matriculants had no other alternative than to become candidates for workshops. Therefore some of us eventually came into open resistance against the disregard and neglect of blind potential which had been deliberately, though purposelessly built up." (Translated)

Since September 1945 efforts were being made to establish an organization of blind persons. After a circular had been sent out and certain preparations made, a meeting was called for 12 October 1946. However, the discussion on the draft constitution which had already been drawn up, could not be completed and the meeting was adjourned until 26 October 1946. At this meeting the South African Blind Workers Organization (S.A.B.W.O.) was finally established. It was also decided that branches would be established in different parts of the country. In this respect it should be mentioned that Dr Walter Cohen became the first chairman of the first branch, namely Johannesburg.

In order to exercise control over the national organization, provision was made in the constitution for a Head Committee. It would





Mr A. Zeelie of Braille Services (left) and Dr W. Cohen, chairman of the Braille Sub-Committee of the Committee for Cultural Affairs of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, busy on problems in connection with braille for the Black languages.



Braille Services — Department of braille production for Black languages.



consist of representatives of each branch together with the office bearers. With regard to the first meeting of the Head Committee, Mr E. J. J. Kruger writes as follows in the Jubilee edition:<sup>13</sup>

“The first Head Committee meeting took place during October 1947 with A. J. C. Schwartz as President. He was succeeded by J. Fuchs of Cape Town and later by the present President,<sup>14</sup> D. C. Malan. The first honorary general secretary was J. C. Mostert, and he was later succeeded by the late Miss B. Schutte and still later by the present honorary general secretary, E. J. J. Kruger.”

(Translated)

Since that time there have been further developments with regard to office bearers. Mr R. L. Park was elected in 1972 in the place of Mr D. C. Malan. After one term Mr Park was succeeded by Miss C. Aucamp in 1976. She is the present President of the Organization. Mr E. J. J. Kruger is still the Honorary General Secretary.

Although the basic objective of the Organization after 33 years is still placement in open labour, quite a number of other projects have been launched for the benefit of blind people in general. The most important of these was the establishment of Braille Services. There was a pressing need at that time for more Afrikaans reading matter in the S.A. Library for the Blind. It was also necessary to make provision for literature for adult blind individuals, including students. The braille printing press of the Worcester School for the Blind concentrated chiefly on educational matter. Furthermore, provision had to be made for the printing of school text books in the braille systems of the chief Black languages, owing to the establishment of schools for blind Black children in the different regions. The person who took the initiative in this matter was Mr E. J. J. Kruger who, besides being Honorary Secretary of the Organization, also became the Honorary Director of Braille Services.

Originally he and his wife, Mrs Monica Kruger, had started a braille transcription service on a small scale, but the demands which were made on them as a result of the escalation of the work became too great. The time had arrived when paid staff with the necessary professional knowledge and technical skills would have to be appointed in order to produce braille reading matter of the required standard. With regard to the growth of Braille Services, we quote the following from the latest annual report (1978-1979) of the Honorary Director:

“From just a few hundred braille pages in the first year, the ser-

vice has grown to nearly three quarter million.<sup>15</sup> From approximately R100 in the first year, the estimates have risen to R131 950 for 1978-1979."

Besides the work which Braille Services does for the S.A. Library for the Blind and other bodies, it also provides the following services:

Printing of *Imfama*, the organ of the National Council, in braille.

Printing of two monthly magazines in Black braille, namely *Ilanga Lethu* in Zulu-Xhosa and *Sedibeng* in Sotho.

The publication of *Brailorama*, a monthly bilingual magazine in braille with *SABWO News* as a supplement.

Another project which the S.A. Blind Workers Organization had started was the trades bureau. Initially arrangements were made with firms to obtain discount for blind persons with a view to alleviating the high cost of living. At the present time the system has been changed, and loans are granted to selected members of the organization.

Since placement in employment is considered the first priority it is understandable that the office of honorary placement officer would be established. This person is required to submit a report on his activities to the Head Committee.

In order to meet all its obligations, which include the granting of bursaries to deserving blind and partially sighted pupils and students, head office, with the aid of the branches, must apply itself assiduously to fund-raising.

Each branch does valuable work at all levels in its own area. An example is the excellent services performed by the Eastern Cape branch in the field of social work, by means of its own social worker.

Further, with regard to financial matters, it should be mentioned that the organization, with the assistance of its branches, has built up a fund over the years with the object of acquiring its own building to accommodate both head office and Braille Services. This ideal was attained when the Minister of National Education, the Honourable W. A. Cruywagen, opened the S.A.B.W.O.'s own building which had been paid for in full, in Mayfair, Johannesburg, on 12 January 1979.

On studying the bulky agenda of the most recent Head Committee meeting, and especially the reports of the eight branches, one is duly impressed by the comprehensiveness of the work, and the thoroughness with which it is being performed. One can agree with Mr Theo Pauw, Chairman of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, when on

the occasion of the 23rd session of the Head Committee at Worcester, he declared:

“The establishment of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization was one of the most important events in the history of welfare work for the blind. The slanted conception of the blind person has been removed and an entire new image of dignity and usefulness has arisen in its place. Of much greater significance is the fact that the blind individual himself has discovered that it is much better to serve than to be served.”

To conclude, we wish to quote two short paragraphs from an address which Miss C. E. Aucamp, as President of the S.A.B.W.O., delivered at the recent Head Committee meeting held in Pretoria in October 1978. Here is shown her exceptionally clear and balanced view of various aspects of services to the blind. Before we do this, however, let us first dwell briefly on the life and work of this talented blind person.

After a successful school and university career (B.A. at the University of South Africa, and M.A. and the Higher Teachers' Diploma at the University of Stellenbosch) she was appointed as a teacher in the secondary section of the Worcester School for the Blind. Besides her ordinary teaching work she became proficient as a braille expert, and published a textbook with the title “Ses Punte” (Six Dots) which is especially intended for adults who wish to learn braille. In 1964, in collaboration with Mr J. van Eeden, head of the Worcester School Braille Printing Press, she revised the manual for Afrikaans braille which had been compiled between the years 1932 and 1938. Her interest in the education of the blind induced her to interrupt her career for a year, in order to follow a training course for teachers of the blind at the well-known Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, U.S.A. Service to her fellow blind however, extended further than education, and she felt drawn towards the S.A.B.W.O., where she could put her experience and expertise to good effect. She succeeded to such a degree that she was eventually elected to the highest office, namely that of President of the organization. In the abovementioned presidential address, reference is also made to that group of blind persons who are obliged to make a living in sheltered employment. At the same time Miss Aucamp refers to the struggle which is still being waged to make the blind independent. She says:

“In accordance with the motives which actuated the establishment and existence of our Organization we are under an obliga-

tion to exert ourselves on behalf of the blind who are able to make an independent living. In the heat of the struggle (a struggle which could so easily have been avoided if people had a greater understanding of each other's needs) in the heat of the struggle, I say, we have lost touch with the people who have indeed found refuge in sheltered workshops for the blind. . . . But if we are a workers' organization we are also an organization for promoting the interests of these people when they need us.

In another part of her address she refers to the vast technological development which is now taking place and from which the blind are also reaping benefits in the shape of various electronic devices. However many are deprived of these aids on account of their being too costly, and beyond the means of the persons who need them. Sufficient assistance is also not forthcoming. In this connection she asks:

"Are we destined to witness a situation in which modern technological appliances are designed, and modern teaching techniques developed, which we are unable to make available to the independent blind people in our country — the very people who are able to use them to the best possible advantage?"

One therefore comes to the conclusion that the S.A. Blind Workers Organization is a viable movement which deals with all facets of the rendering of services to the blind on a national level.

### **The League of Friends of the Blind**

In 1931 the Rev. A.W. Blaxall, then superintendent of the Athlone School for the Blind, undertook a tour, accompanied by a few of his pupils, to Johannesburg and Kimberley in order to gain support for the school. To encourage Coloured parents to send their blind children to the school, he addressed meetings where demonstrations were given by the pupils of their work. They received so much support, especially in Kimberley, and made so many friends among the Coloured community, that the idea occurred to him to form an organization for the rendering of assistance not only to the Athlone School but also to adult blind persons. Shortly after the return of the group to Cape Town a meeting of interested persons was held in the Zuid Afrikaanse Gesticht, a hall belonging to a church denomination in Cape Town. The persons who were responsible for the arrangements were the Rev. A. W. Blaxall, Mr I. J. Jacobs and Mr E. Ramsdale. At the meeting the League of Friends of the Blind was established and Mr Blaxall was



elected chairman. He however resigned after three months and Mr I. J. Jacobs succeeded him. Mr E. Ramsdale was elected as secretary and Miss F. January as treasurer. The object was to provide an extensive service to Coloured blind persons by establishing branches in various parts of the country. The remote branches, namely those in Kimberley and Port Elizabeth, were dissolved after some time but the branches in the Cape Peninsula remained active. The first branch was established in Wynberg, and according to the brochure which was published during the fifties, there were also branches at Claremont, Retreat, Bellville and Grassy Park at that time. At the present time there are five branches in the Peninsula and three in the country, namely Oudtshoorn, Stellenbosch and Worcester.

The objectives of the League are set out in the abovementioned brochure as follows:

- “(a) To arrange and where necessary provide education, training and employment for Coloured Blind Persons.
- (b) To provide Relief Grants, Medical Aid, Home Comforts and General Assistance to Coloured Blind Persons.
- (c) To provide facilities for the Social Rehabilitation of Coloured Blind Persons, particularly in the sphere of improving living conditions — general, physical, etc.
- (d) To spread propaganda and take any necessary steps for the prevention of blindness.
- (e) To provide any assistance not specified above.”

Besides the welfare services which the League renders to individual blind persons, it has also undertaken several important projects. The first was the establishment of a hostel for blind women who work for the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society, or elsewhere. The second large project was the establishment of a holiday home at Strandfontein in the Cape Peninsula. The building as well as the furnishings was acquired with the aid of the Lions International service club. It was opened in February 1975 by the president of Lions International. The South African National Council for the Blind periodically contributes towards the maintenance of the holiday home. The building serves various purposes. Besides housing blind persons who come to spend their holidays there, accommodation is also provided for groups of pupils of the Athlone School for the Blind as well as for persons (and their escorts) who have to attend Cape hospitals for eye treatment.

Another project which is being undertaken at the present time is the building of a hostel for men, which will fill a great need.

The League of Friends of the Blind works in close collaboration with the Division for Coloured Blind and consequently a much wider field is covered than was previously possible. The present chairman of the League is Mr M. P. Lewin, and Rev. P. M. Bam is the Secretary. At the beginning the name of Mr I. J. Jacobs was mentioned as one of the founder members of the League and also as virtually its first chairman. In view of the fact that he played an important part in many fields of welfare work for Coloured blind persons, it is appropriate that a short review of his life and work should be given at this stage.

Isaac John Jacobs was born on 28 July 1907 and was therefore over 19 years when the Athlone School for the Blind was established in 1927. Although he was older than the admission age, permission was granted for him to attend the School. He took a course in piano tuning, a profession he practised until quite recently. He was also involved in welfare work and was the first president of the International Youth Organization. For many years he was a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. It can be deduced from the above as well as from the history of the Division for Coloured Blind, that he played an important part in organizations for the blind and, assisted by his wife, in various welfare projects. In 1976 he was granted honorary life-membership of the League of Friends of the Blind in recognition of the leading role he had played for forty-five years in the organization.

### **The South African Guide-dog Association for the Blind**

The guide-dog movement was started on the initiative of Mrs Gladys Evans. As a blind person it was her desire to possess a guide-dog, since she was of a very independent nature. In June 1952 she went to the school of the British Guide-Dog Association at Leamington Spa to obtain a guide-dog. There was no vacancy however, and she had to wait until February 1953 for an opportunity to receive the necessary training along with her dog. This was the well-known Sheena. After returning to South Africa, she and Mr Douglas Evans to whom she was married at the time, decided to start a similar organization here. The initial step was to form a committee of interested persons. A meeting was held in January 1954 and the S.A. Guide-dog Association was born. Two members of the committee were well-known in the field of ser-



Mrs Gladys Evans, founder of the S.A. Guide Dogs Association.



Mrs Hugh Wiley, founder-member of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, founder of the O.F.S. Society



Mr J. R. Fuchs, former member of the Executive Committee of the National Council, former President of the S.A.B.W.O., and former Mayor of Goodwood, Cape.



vices to the blind. They were Dr Walter Cohen and Dr P. Boshoff. Mr D. M. Evans was elected chairman, and from the beginning he was the driving force behind the movement.

It was realised however, that the first task of the newly established organization would be the raising of funds. A huge fund-raising campaign was launched under the leadership of Gladys Evans, who also used her dog Sheena for this purpose. She is fond of saying that it was a triumvirate that put the Association on its feet: Douglas and Gladys Evans, and Sheena. The campaign which was organized country-wide was a huge success. The result was that already in 1955 a house and premises were hired at 1 Glamorgan Road, Parkwood, Johannesburg. Michael Bibicoff and his wife were brought from England to take charge of the training of the guide-dogs and their blind masters. The interesting part of this appointment was that Mr Bibicoff had been an instructor at Leamington Spa when Mrs Evans was there, and she had received her training from him. Then already she had discussed with him the possibility of a training centre in South Africa. By virtue of the fact that such an experienced instructor could be employed the first two guide-dogs and their masters were able to complete their training as early as the beginning of 1956.

After a second national fund-raising campaign had been launched, the Association bought a property in Parktown in 1958, on which it built a training centre. The work progressed, and approximately ten to twelve dogs were trained annually.

Problems were encountered, however, with the training of apprentice instructors. The work was demanding, and most of them left before completing the course. A further setback ensued when Mr Bibicoff decided to return to England in 1960. Fortunately the Association was able to obtain the services of Mr Lionel Wilson, a qualified instructor from England. In 1961 Mr Kenneth Lord joined the organization. He qualified as an instructor in September 1963, and when Mr Wilson resigned in 1969, Mr Lord succeeded him as chief instructor. He still serves the Association in that capacity.

In 1966 it was decided to name the institution the Gladys Evans Training Centre. In the same year Mr D. M. Evans resigned after 14 years as chairman and Mr C. Z. Rangecroft was elected to succeed him.

Besides the guide-dog as an aid to mobility there is another aid namely the long cane, the use of which was developed in America shortly after the second World War. In this connection the committee of the



Guide-Dog Association decided to send Mr Lord to the Midlands Mobility Centre, England, early in 1969, to take a course in the long cane technique. He returned as a qualified instructor, but could not start immediately with the instruction, since the demand for guide-dogs was so great at that time that the staff were fully occupied. It was only in 1974, when Mr Daniel Wood arrived from America on a two-year contract, that the long cane technique could be put into practice. Mr Wood returned in February 1976. Subsequently a full course in orientation and mobility employing the long cane technique was undertaken by the organization under the guidance of Mr Lord. The services of Mr Tom Davies of New Zealand were obtained to assist him.

In the meantime the training of guide-dogs continued. In 1972 Mr Lord attended a conference in Cannes, France, where representatives of various training schools were present. He mentions in his report that the type of harness which is in use in South Africa had attracted a great deal of attention.

Mr Lord also attended a conference on mobility and orientation in Australia, as well as the second international congress in London in July 1976, which was attended by delegates from seventeen countries. These facts are mentioned to indicate how well aware the management of the Association was of the necessity for international contacts which could lead to the improvement of the service here.

With regard to the present situation, the most recent report of the S.A. Guide-Dog Association for the Blind to the National Council, states that 38 dogs have undergone training during the past three years, which brings the total of trained guide-dogs since the establishment of the Association to approximately 300. The service is offered to all population groups and extensive developments are held in prospect. With regard to the Orientation and Mobility school (long cane training), two courses were offered during 1978 and eight mobility instructors were trained. The number has now reached 30, and 4 more are expected to qualify in 1979.

On various occasions Mr Lord has set forth the advantages of taking a course in mobility and orientation for the blind. He does this by means of lectures at conferences, and the distribution of information.

### **Tape Aids for the Blind**

Tape Aids for the Blind is a national organization which provides all

types of literature on tape for the blind of South Africa. The service is free. The literature can be divided into two main categories:

Recordings of an educational nature for individuals including students, and for schools and similar institutions;

Recordings of recreational literature, fiction and non-fiction for all blind persons.

The organization which renders extensive services, and is housed in its own building in Durban, started on a very small scale. In 1958 Jan Andries Venter, a railway clerk in Durban who was a tape enthusiast, recorded a book on tape for a blind friend. This made him realise the value of tape recording for the blind, not only for recreational purposes but also to assist students in their studies. The result was that he enlisted the aid of a group of people to record books for the blind on tape. This eventually led to the establishment of Tape-Aids for the Blind in the same year (1958).

Besides providing books on tape to individual blind persons, the organization soon expanded to include a library service. Selected books in both official languages were made available on loan. The production grew and developed to such an extent that a catalogue had to be compiled and distributed among the readers. Any blind person could become a member of the library, free of charge, and those who could not afford to acquire their own tape recorder, were provided with one on indefinite loan. The service soon became known among the blind and the number of members increased rapidly.

The annual reports of the organization record a sustained growth and development with regard to both production and diversification. In order to describe the growth as well as the diversity of services, we quote from various reports.

In the 18th biennial report of the Council (1964 - 1966) Tape Aids for the Blind reports as follows:

"There are now nearly 450 members of whom an average of over 300 are served monthly, and during 1965 no fewer than 56 recorders were provided on indefinite loan to blind people. Over 100 new books were added to the library last year (1965) and there are now nearly 400 titles available . . . In addition to books in English and Afrikaans, many text books in Zulu and Xhosa are currently being read at levels from Sub A to Standard six."

In comparison with the abovementioned production figures we

quote the following from the Chairman's report for the year ending 31 December 1978:

"We now have more than 3 000 titles in our library – to be precise 3 169. To try and give you some idea as to the size of our library and the numbers of cassettes we hold, may I help you with some arithmetic. If we have 3 000 titles and an average book consists of eight cassettes, and we hold an average six copies of each book, it means we have in our library no less than 144 000 cassettes, each of which contains 90 minutes reading."

With regard to the diversity of literature, we read the following in a brochure (Our Years of Progress) which appeared in 1970:

"Text books and lecture notes have been recorded on subjects as diverse as Latin and Economics, English literature and Biology, the Law of Administration of Estates and the Practice of Medicine."

In the same brochure it was mentioned that the number of persons who received machines on loan, had risen to 100. At that time reading material was sent to an average of 547 readers per month.

The expansion of Tape Aids for the Blind over the past 21 years since its inception, was made possible through an effective system of publicity and fund-raising. All funds are contributed by the private sector, since the organization receives no financial support from the State. A feature of the service is that all reading is done by volunteers only. An effective system of screening ensures that a high standard of recording is maintained.

Branches of Tape Aids for the Blind exist in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Springs, Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein. Each branch has a committee which amongst other duties is responsible for making contact with new members, visiting old age homes with the object of introducing the service, and rendering assistance in connection with fund-raising and general propaganda work. The Johannesburg branch contributes approximately one third of the reading material and three modern studios have been instituted there.

Tape Aids for the Blind is governed by a Council on which representatives from various parts of the country serve. The present Chairman is Mr Peter Ditz. Persons who in the past played a prominent part in the organization were Air Marshal Sir Douglas Jackman, a former Chairman, Mr Alan Wilson who still serves on the Council, and Mrs Stella Stent, a retired National Secretary.

## Worcester School for the Blind

It has previously been stated in chapter one that the rendering of services to the blind in South Africa began with the education of the blind child. This took place when the Deaf and Blind Institute was established in 1881. From this sprang the Worcester School for the Blind. Its early history has already been dealt with up to 1929, a year which is of two-fold importance, for it was then that the National Council for the Blind was established, and also that Mr (later Dr) P.E. Biesenbach was appointed principal of the Worcester School. We therefore continue the history of the School from this point onwards.

With the appointment of Mr P.E. Biesenbach a new order was ushered in. The Vocational Education and Special Schools Act (Act no. 29 of 1928) by which the Department of Education, Arts and Science assumed responsibility for special education, had just come into force. To this must be added that Biesenbach had a new approach to the education of the blind child. He openly stated that special education in itself was not the ultimate objective, and that if pupils who have completed their courses could not lead a gainful existence, their education had been lacking in some way or other. However, this did not indicate that he denied his pupils to achieve the highest academic qualifications possible. On the contrary, he insisted that the blind were entitled to these. In order to achieve this object, he first raised the school-leaving level from standard seven to standard eight. (The first group of Junior Certificate candidates wrote their examinations at the end of 1931). In addition he extended the vocational department in order to introduce new trades. During 1930 an additional post of vocational instructor was created, to which Mr G.H. Biesenbach was appointed. After negotiations with the Department, a post of vice-principal was also created from January 1931. Mr V.H. Vaughan was appointed to this post. The vice-principal would not only be an additional member of the staff, but would also be responsible for the academic section of the school, thus leaving the principal free to concentrate on the general organization and the administration of the school, to promote a better relationship between the school and the public, and to obtain without which expansion could not take place. Furthermore the principal could now direct his attention to the vocational section with the object of establishing a workshop for those school-leavers who could not make a living in open labour. A report on the establishment of the Workshops and Homes for the Blind in 1933, will follow later.



In order to implement the expansion which Mr Biesenbach had in mind, a building programme had to be planned. The first new building to be erected was a gymnasium hall in 1934. He was concerned about the general health of his blind pupils. In his thesis<sup>16</sup> he gave much thought to the matter. In the same year a post for a teacher of physical education was created. Three years later, in 1937, a new school building was erected. The increase in the number of pupils and consequently of the staff, as well as the possibility that the matriculation course would be introduced later made this necessary. Further expansion for the printing of school books in braille had become urgent. A braille printing press is indispensable in a school for the blind, especially in South Africa, where all the required school text books have to be printed in both English and Afrikaans braille. In addition the Bible in Afrikaans appeared at that time, and had to be transcribed into braille.

With regard to Afrikaans braille, it should be mentioned that in 1932 it had become necessary to revise the system which was in use in view of certain changes which had been made to the English braille system during that year, and which had to be taken into account in connection with Afrikaans braille.

When the Deaf and Blind Institute opened a section for the blind in 1891 the first few pupils did not use braille but line type.<sup>17</sup> After Mr Besselaar's (Vice-Principal) return from Europe a few months later, braille was immediately introduced. For English the current system of English braille was used and certain braille books were ordered from England. With regard to Dutch braille (Afrikaans had not yet been introduced into the schools) the Dutch system of braille contractions were used. There were very few of these in comparison with English braille. The contractions that existed were reviewed and added to by a group of teachers and pupils. This system was completed in 1907.

When Dutch was replaced by Afrikaans in the school, the Dutch braille system was applied to Afrikaans. This was unsatisfactory, with the result that Mr M.J. Besselaar, then principal of the school, and his staff devised a system specifically for Afrikaans, which was completed in 1923. Afrikaans books were from then onward printed in this system.

In 1932 the revision of the Afrikaans braille system was assigned to the vice-principal, Mr V. H. Vaughan. The matter was referred to the Department of Union Education which, on the recommendation of the

School, appointed a committee to be of assistance. Besides the braille-printer Mr J. J. Cronjé, and Mr Vaughan, who were sighted persons, all the other members of the committee were blind since the testing of specific signs and contractions had to be done by blind persons themselves. The committee consisted of: Messrs V. H. Vaughan (chairman), J. J. Cronjé, B. Kruger, T. Matthews, S. Muller, P. Schutte and C. Kruger. In order to determine which contractions had to be included in the system it was necessary to establish the incidence of letter combinations and words which occur most frequently in Afrikaans. Braille signs had to be found for them. For this purpose 269 009 words were counted from sixteen different types of literature. This statistical material which was then collated and analysed was derived from the book by G. Aucamp: *Woordeskat en Woordeherhaling*,<sup>18</sup> which appeared in 1932. The author's object was to determine which 1 000 words in Afrikaans were most frequently used.<sup>19</sup>

Towards the middle of 1934 a tentative system had already been completed and a few articles have appeared in the *Nuwe Pionier*, a braille magazine published by the school. This afforded braille readers the opportunity of commenting on, and discussing the new symbols. The braille committee met frequently in order to make the necessary alterations until the time arrived that a final manual could be compiled. This was done by Mr V.H. Vaughan and it appeared in 1938 in both sighted and braille print. A shorthand braille system in Afrikaans was subsequently devised. It was completed in 1942. This was done with a view to training braille shorthand typists at the School.

When it became expedient, after almost twenty years, to make certain adjustments to the Afrikaans braille system, a conference was convened by Mr Biesenbach, at which braille experts from all parts of the country were present. It was held in March 1959, under the chairmanship of Mr V. H. Vaughan,<sup>20</sup> who represented the Department of Education, Arts and Science. At the conference it was resolved to request Miss C. E. Aucamp and Mr J. P. van Eeden to compile a revised manual. Miss Aucamp is still a member of the staff of the Worcester School and Mr Van Eeden is head of the braille printing press. When the revised manual appeared in 1964, Mr Theo Pauw, principal of the School, wrote the introduction, and at the end thanked certain persons and bodies, amongst whom were "Miss C.E. Aucamp and Mr J.P. van Eeden, who with true dedication, performed a labour of love on behalf of the School and the blind of South Africa."

For many years after the establishment of the school text books had to be transcribed into braille by hand by teachers and pupils. In 1903 a braille printing press was acquired, but each dot had to be set by hand, which was a time consuming operation. In 1904 Sir Abe Bailey (the well-known financier) made a donation to the School for the purchasing of the first braille writing machine (also known as the stereo machine), by which means mass production of braille was made possible. This machine which was operated with the foot, has since been replaced by electrically driven stereo machines.

The first printer was appointed in 1905. He was Mr Willem Marais, a blind person. He was later succeeded by two blind persons, one after the other, until a sighted person was appointed in 1924. He was Mr J.J. Cronje who was mainly responsible for the initial expansion of the printing department. Stereo and copying machines were ordered from abroad, and the staff was gradually augmented. After the death of Mr Cronje in 1946, Mr A. J. Viljoen became the head of the printing department. When he resigned at the end of 1949, Mr J. P. van Eeden was appointed in his place in 1950. He is still today the head of the printing press. As early as 1933 the first Afrikaans Bible book was printed in braille. It was the Gospel of St. John. However, owing to technical problems which arose, the work was suspended but was resumed in 1939. The entire Afrikaans Bible was completed on 26 August 1940, and consisted of 75 volumes. In a later reprint the number of volumes was reduced to half as many as the original by increasing the number of pages in each volume.

At the present time a new building is being erected by the School for the production of literature in all three media: braille, tape, and large print.

An important milestone in the history of the school was the introduction of the matriculation course in 1943. The first candidates sat for the examination at the end of 1944. It was a forward step, for matriculation had become a prerequisite for taking the physiotherapy course at the Royal National Institute for the Blind in London, to which our students were sent for their training. The matriculation certificate was also essential for entrance to a university.

In 1947 the vice-principal went overseas to take a course in training of teachers at schools for the blind at the Perkins School for the Blind, Boston, U.S.A. On his return he introduced an in-service training course for the teaching staff. The course, however, was not recognised

by the Department of Education, and many years elapsed before a complete university course became a reality. This occurred in 1965, when a course was instituted at the University of South Africa.

Another important development was the introduction of a department of psychology in 1949, when Mr J. S. Gericke was appointed as teacher-psychologist. This fulfilled a great need, in view of the specific problems of the visually handicapped child, and the necessity for the devising of adapted tests. Mr Gericke has been doing pioneering work in this field for many years.

In 1959 a section for deaf-blind pupils was started at the school. The incentive to bring this about was the discovery of an eleven year old boy at Benoni, David Geyser, who had become blind and deaf after an attack of cerebral meningitis. He was admitted to the school in January 1959. The first teacher and head of this department was Miss K. van Rensburg who had had many years experience of the education of the deaf. In August 1958 she left for America and attended a course in the teaching of the deaf-blind at the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston. She returned to South Africa in January 1959. Under her guidance the work expanded and a separate building was erected to house the department. She retired in 1968 after 10 years of service in this field. The work was continued with great success by those who followed in her footsteps.

We have already made mention of the recording of books on tape by the S.A. Library for the Blind. It stands to reason that the School would follow the Library's example, since tape must be considered supplementary to braille as a medium in teaching blind pupils. In 1961 the School sent Mr W. Viljoen abroad to study the production of books on tape. After his return a recording studio was built, and the tapes department was placed on a firm footing. Besides the books which are recorded on tape a weekly Afrikaans magazine and a newsletter are also published.

Dr Biesenbach retired in 1961 after 32 years of service as the principal of the Worcester School for the Blind. Since he had also played an important part in the establishment and development of the National Council, and had served on the Executive Committee for a number of years, including a period as vice-chairman, it is appropriate to report briefly in his life and work.

**Paul Ewald Biesenbach** was born on 23 October 1899 at Steinkopf, Namaqualand, where his father was a missionary of a German Mission



Society. After having completed his schooling at Carnarvon he attended the University of Stellenbosch where he received the degrees of B.A. and B. Ed. As early as the end of 1925 the principalship of the Worcester School for the Blind was offered to him. At first he declined, but after a further period of study and teaching at various schools, he eventually accepted the post. The Board of Management of the School then decided that he should undertake an overseas study tour before starting with his work. Accompanied by Mrs Biesenbach, he left in March 1928, and returned at the end of the year. He assumed duty in January 1929 as principal of the school.

Biesenbach's primary and most important aim was to secure full status for the school, which would comprise all the academic and other facilities of an ordinary school. The major developments which took place during his term of office are examples of his endeavour.

He remained a student, as is proved by the comprehensive thesis he wrote for his doctor's degree in education, which traces the history of the school, gives a critical survey of various aspects of the education of the blind, and also deals with welfare work amongst the blind.

It has previously been mentioned that Dr Biesenbach diligently applied himself to the task of establishing an institution where work could be provided for those who are unable to make a living in the open labour situation. The result was that a workshop was opened on 1 May 1933. Under his supervision as its superintendent, the workshop expanded rapidly and today is considered the best developed system of sheltered employment for the blind in the country. It is run on modern factory lines.

Dr Biesenbach's constant interest in cultural matters and in affairs of his community continued after his retirement. He was a member of the Town Council of Worcester as well as of the School Board, the Hospital Board, the Chamber of Commerce and several other bodies. He remained in office as the superintendent of the workshop until 1968. He died in December 1971.

Mr Theo Pauw succeeded Dr Biesenbach as principal of the school in 1961. In the chapter where a summary is given of his life and work, reference has been made to the developments which took place at the School during his term of office, and his involvement with them, as well as to his educational study tours to other countries. To this must be added a few of the other outstanding events and developments which took place at the time.

In 1964 a separate department for the education of the partially sighted was begun. The classes were conducted in a temporary building, geographically separated from the main school building. Emanating from this a beginning was made with the printing of large type books. The planning of a new building for the partially sighted has now reached its final stages.

In April 1964 the first conference on the education of the blind and partially sighted was organised by the School and was held at Worcester. Four more conferences followed at intervals, at Worcester and in Pretoria.

In view of the expansion which had taken place in connection with the provision of literature in braille, on tape, and in large print, it was decided to erect a building for the production of all three media. Owing to lack of space on the campus a site was bought elsewhere in Worcester by the Board of Management. This production unit is now in the course of construction.

In 1975 a new music department was opened. The building houses, amongst other things, a library for braille music and a small auditorium.

With regard to the organization of the School itself, an information office for the convenience of visitors, parents, students and other interested persons was opened in 1977. It is permanently manned by a member of the staff. In this connection it should also be mentioned that the School periodically publishes monographs on subjects pertaining to various aspects of the education and care of the visually handicapped child.

When studying any one of the School's latest annual reports, one is impressed by the extensive extramural programme of the School. It is supplementary to the academic teaching, and is in accordance with the policy of the School as well as Mr Pauw's view that all facets of the child's development should receive attention.

Mr Pauw retired on 30 June 1979 and was succeeded on 1 July 1979 by Mr Johan van der Poel, who was formerly the principal of the Efata School for the Blind and Deaf in Umtata, Transkei.

### **The Athlone School for the Blind**

When the Athlone School for the Blind was established in 1927 (the story of its establishment was told in Chapter 1) Mr S. H. Lawrence was appointed Superintendent and his wife, Mrs I. J. Lawrence, as

“Teacher-Matron”. Mr Lawrence had been a missionary for some time in the Far East and Mrs Lawrence was a qualified teacher of the blind.<sup>21</sup> The School was situated in a dwelling-house in Athlone<sup>22</sup> near Cape Town, but after a year was moved to temporary corrugated iron buildings at Faure, near Somerset West. After Mr Lawrence’s departure in 1931, the Rev. A. W. Blaxall succeeded him as Superintendent. Mrs Lawrence continued in the post of “Principal-teacher”, and Mrs Florence Blaxall was appointed Matron.

When Mr and Mrs Blaxall moved to Johannesburg on 1 April 1937, a new order was ushered in. The post of Superintendent was abolished and replaced by that of Principal. Mr A. B. W. Marlow was appointed from January 1938, and Mrs Lawrence as Vice-Principal. It can be presumed that Mrs Lawrence deputised for the nine months in the interim between Mr Blaxall’s departure and the arrival of Mr Marlow.

From the very beginning the school’s management board realised that training in certain trades was essential with a view to future employment after the pupils left school. In 1929 Mr P. R. Botha, who had been trained at the Worcester School for the Blind, was appointed as Trade Instructor. Basket making was the main trade at that time. In 1936 Miss E. Yardley, a qualified instructress from England, was appointed to teach the girls, mainly weaving and knitting. Later, in 1939, a second post of instructor was created for the boys, and Mr T. R. Gair was appointed.

Although the school had been established primarily “for the education of blind Coloured children”, it was initially made accessible to non-white blind children from all over the country since there were no schools for blind Blacks or Indians at that time. In the third biennial report of the National Council (1933-1934) the following figures in connection with the enrolment were supplied:

“Twenty-four new pupils were admitted during the year, bringing the total number of blind persons in the institution up to 78. Since the school opened in 1927 the number entered in our books is 95, from which the following interesting figures are to be noted: Coloured 64, African 30, Indian 1. From the Cape Province 72, Transvaal 10, O.F.S. 9, Natal 2, Basotuland 2.”

When in the fifties a beginning was made with the establishment of schools for Black blind children and one for Indians, the number of children from these groups gradually diminished, with the result that at the present time it is a school for Coloureds only. In 1961 the School

was placed under the management of the Administration of Coloured Affairs, in accordance with legislation. In this connection it should be mentioned that the School, as a state aided institution, was initially subsidised by the then Department of Union Education, according to a fixed formula, in accordance with Act. No. 21 of 1928. The full salaries of the school staff, and a part of the salaries of the other staff members were paid, as well as a subsidy on approved expenditure and an allowance for each child, calculated according to a means test which was applicable to their parents. When the Administration of Coloured Affairs took over, the same formula of subsidisation was applied. The subsidies were increased as the time went on, and at present they amount to more than 90 per cent of the total expenditure of the school.

Two developments which took place during the first decade of the school's history deserve to be mentioned. The first is in connection with the employment of the pupils after they had completed their vocational training. At the second meeting of the Management Board, held on 14 November 1933, it was resolved to change the name of the School to "The Athlone School and Workshops for the Blind (Coloured, Indian and Bantu)".<sup>23</sup> It was only in 1936, however, that the Management Board hired a house in Faure Township, where five workers and three trainees were taken into service. Mr T. R. Gair was appointed Instructor. The workshop functioned until 1939, when Mr Gair accepted a post at the School.

The second matter, which could be considered unique for those days, was the establishment of a class for partially sighted children at the School in 1934. It was the first effort made in connection with the education of the partially sighted in this country. The Worcester School for the Blind only started with such a class in 1948, and the first school, namely the Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted in Pretoria, was established in 1963. Since 1934 the Athlone School has continued with the provision of education for the partially sighted and this is still a feature of the school at the present day.

After the appointment of Mr Marlow in 1937, it became clear that, in view of the developments which he held in prospect, a new permanent school had to be built. No expansion was possible at the corrugated iron buildings at Faure. The search for a suitable site then began. After negotiations a large piece of ground in the wooded area of the Cape Flats south of Bellville was acquired. Mr Marlow immediately be-



came actively engaged in the planning of the buildings. A modern school with all the necessary facilities for the education of the visually handicapped child rose on the site. The new School was occupied in July 1941. The dedication of the building was performed by the Archbishop of Cape Town, and the official opening took place on 26 February 1942. The guest speaker was the Honourable J. H. Hofmeyr, Minister of Education.

As the numbers increased and the work expanded, additions to the buildings had to be made from time to time, to keep pace with the demands of modern education. For that reason equipment was installed for the printing of large-type books for the pupils in the class for the partially sighted. All textbooks in braille were printed by the Worcester School for the Blind.

The highest class in the school was standard eight. It was recently decided, however, to introduce the Senior Certificate course, and the first pupils will write the examination next year.

Mr Marlow retired on 30 June 1965. His contribution to the education of the blind child and the role he played with regard to the general welfare of the blind through his connection with the S. A. National Council for the Blind, is described elsewhere.

The new Principal was Mr A. B. Cilliers. He assumed duty on 1 July 1965. From the school records it appears that two important milestones were reached during his term of office. Firstly, the separation of the partially sighted section was brought into effect. An empty house was equipped for this purpose. Secondly, a course in telephony was introduced in July 1967 and the first two candidates completed their course at the end of that year.

On 31 March 1969 Mr Cilliers resigned to accept the post of Inspector in the Department of Indian Affairs. Mr J. R. Solms was appointed in his place and assumed duty on 1 April 1969.

Junias Reinecke Solms was indeed no newcomer to the field of the education of the visually handicapped when he became Principal of the School. In 1957 he was appointed Vice-Principal, and was thus conversant with the organization of the School and the education of the blind child.

During his term of office Mr Solms not only maintained the high standard of teaching but was also instrumental in the implementation of many new developments.<sup>24</sup> In this connection the appointment of the first music teacher at the School in January 1973 should be men-

tioned. In that same year, namely in August 1973, a class for deaf-blind children was begun with Mrs G. Lambert as the responsible teacher. In September 1972 she had started with a course in the education of the deaf-blind at the Perkins School for the Blind, Boston, U.S.A. which she completed in June 1973. The next important development was the establishment of a class for retarded blind and partially sighted children in June 1975. Instruction in mobility and orientation followed. In his 49th annual report (1975-1976) the Principal reported as follows:

“The instruction given to senior pupils in mobility and orientation referred to in our last report still continues. This service is provided by St Dunstan’s entirely at their expense and is of inestimable value to our pupils.”

With regard to the expansion of the activities of the School Mr Solms could state in his last report (1976-1977) that the Administration of Coloured Affairs had approved a number of senior posts, namely one of deputy principal, three additional posts of vice-principal and two of senior teachers, one of whom would be a teacher-psychologist. In this connection Mr Solms continues:

“These posts are currently being advertised, and when filled will make it possible to extend the range of teaching in the school, especially in the secondary area, where it has long been our desire to offer courses up to the senior certificate level for suitable candidates.”

During his term of office of 21 years at the Athlone School for the Blind, Mr Solms had made an intensive study of braille, as well as of the methods which should be applied to teach it to classes for beginners. He is one of the rare sighted persons who can read braille with their fingers. In view of his knowledge of braille, he is much in demand at conferences as a speaker on the subject. It can also be stated that, as one of the representatives of the National Council for the Blind, he attended the Conference of the International Council for the Education of the Visually Handicapped in Paris, France, in 1977. At present he serves on the Executive Committee of the National Council.<sup>25</sup>

After Mr Solms’s retirement at the end of 1977, Mr B. P. Pizer was appointed Principal. From his first annual report it appears that more developments are envisaged. The enlargement of the school buildings is considered a first priority, in view of the increase in the number of pupils and the introduction of the Senior Certificate course. It was further resolved by the Advisory Board that workshops should be es-

tablished and accommodation provided for those school-leavers who need sheltered employment. The Principal explained that this was not an original idea, since provision for such developments had been written into the constitution and had indeed existed previously at Faure.

### **New Horizon School for the Blind.**

After the publication of the "Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Deviate Children, Volume II (non-European Children)<sup>36</sup> in 1950, the South African National Council for the Deaf convened a conference in 1952 at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg to discuss the findings of the committee. Various organizations involved in welfare work for the handicapped were invited to send representatives. Mr K. M. Pillay represented the Natal Indian Blind Society. At the conference he delivered a strong plea for the establishment of a school for Indian blind children in Natal, in consequence of paragraph 163 of the report, which under the heading: "Deviate Indian Children", reads as follows:

"According to the above statistics there are not enough deviates with defects of sight defects of hearing, epileptics and cripples to justify the establishment of small separate schools. Consequently we recommend the erection of one large school to provide for the worst cases of deviation, namely the blind, partially sighted, the deaf, epileptics and serious cases of crippling. It is further recommended that this school should be erected in Durban so that it should be near the future training centre for non-European doctors."

After Mr Pillay's speech Dr Blaxall, the chairman, asked Dr C. M. van Antwerp, representative of the Department of Education, Arts and Science, whether he was in a position to reply to the matters on which Mr Pillay had touched. It must be stated here that special education of all population groups was the responsibility of the Department of Education, Art and Science at that time. Dr van Antwerp replied that he was fully aware of the situation and that Mr Pillay should discuss the matter with him in Pretoria the following day. In the brochure which was published in 1961 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Natal Indian Blind Society, the circumstances which then prevailed, were described as follows:

"This interview with the Department of Education, Arts and Science was then the beginning of the establishment of the Arthur

Blaxall School for the Blind. The Chairman of the Natal Indian Blind Society returned not only with the inspiration gained at the Conference, but fully satisfied of the support and encouragement of the Department of Education, Arts and Science and outlined the whole scheme to his Committee. Because of these facts the Workshop-Hostel project was temporarily shelved and work was concentrated in establishing a School . . . Almost at the same time, a six roomed tin shanty, slum dwelling at 29 Lorne Street, Durban was offered for sale. This site was ideal and the building could be altered to meet the requirements of a school and hostel. Again the Society lost no time and before the end of the year another milestone had been passed and the property bought for £3 350 (R6 700)."

The Management of the Natal Indian Blind Society which was the parent body of the school, decided to name the school after Rev. (later Dr) A. W. Blaxall in view of the assistance he gave with the establishment of the school and the position he held at that time with regard to the welfare of the blind. It was therefore officially named the "Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind."<sup>27</sup>

The school was officially opened by Dr Louis van Schalkwijk, Chairman of the South African National Council for the Blind, on 4 October 1954.

At that time Dr Blaxall was a minister of the Anglican Church in Durban, where he resided. Mrs Blaxall was appointed as acting principal of the school. She was assisted by two teachers who rendered voluntary service, namely Miss E. C. Champion and Mrs O. Warner.<sup>28</sup> Miss P. Kristiah, an ex-pupil of the Athlone School for the Blind, assisted with the teaching of braille and handwork.

This situation lasted until November 1955 when Mr H. Jagganath was appointed as teacher-in-charge, after he had spent some time at the Athlone School for the Blind. The Department decided that the appointment of a principal should be kept in abeyance until the number of pupils enrolled should warrant it, and the school moved to larger buildings.

As time went on the building became too small and cramped. The school which had started with eight pupils, had 27 in 1960, of whom only three were day scholars. A search for a site on which to build a new school was begun. In the meantime the Management was able to hire additional accommodation in the vicinity. This was in an old fac-



tory building, directly behind the school, which could be converted into a vocational section and two classrooms.

While searching for a suitable site, the idea of a comprehensive institution where the various types of handicapped children could be housed, was still much in evidence. Due to the lack of information the statistics and findings of the Inter-Departmental Committee had to be accepted. The Committee had strongly recommended that such a comprehensive school should be established. The Management of the Society therefore continued with the project, although they realised that it was not in accordance with sound educational principles to accommodate children with different handicaps on the same campus. When the Department of Indian Affairs took over the control of special education<sup>29</sup> the plan for a comprehensive institution was abandoned.

After a continuous search for a suitable site in the environs of Durban had proved unsuccessful, the Management of the school was notified by the Division for Indian Education of the Department of Indian Affairs, that an evacuated school building near Pietermaritzburg was available.

Before reporting on the transfer of the school, it must be stated that the post of teacher-in-charge was changed to that of principal, and Mr B. C. Nursoo was appointed in that capacity. Mr Jagganath stayed on as a teacher for another year. Mr Nursoo, besides possessing teaching qualifications and a B. A. degree, also had a university degree in social work. He was therefore well qualified for this position.

Following an investigation in loco, it was found that, although the buildings which were situated in Royston Road, Mountain View, Pietermaritzburg, were old, the locality and size of the terrain was eminently suitable for a school for the blind. Nevertheless, a great deal of renovation was necessary, and hostel accommodation had to be provided.

The transfer of the school took place in January 1968. The realisation that it would be the permanent home of the school under a new name brought a feeling of stability and drive to the education as a whole. The name of the school was changed on that date (January 1968) to the New Horizon School for the Blind.

By this time the school had developed into a complete educational institution, and the first Senior Certificate class had already sat for their examinations.

The first major project, namely the provision of residential facilities,

was later completed, and the M. E. C. Paruk Hostel was opened on 1 November 1975 by the Honourable S. J. M. Steyn, Minister of Indian Affairs. It was a splendid occasion which coincided with the 21st anniversary of the school. The hostel was built at a cost of approximately R300 000 of which the Department of Indian Affairs contributed R261 000 in the form of a subsidy. Mr. M. E. C. Paruk donated R25 000 as part of the balance, which was the school's responsibility. This was the reason for his name being given to the building. In his speech, as Chairman of the Management Board, Mr C. M. Bassa made mention of the financial and other assistance which the Department of Indian Affairs had rendered over the years, and of the co-operation which existed between the Board and the Government. With regard to education Mr Bassa stated the following:

"The education of the visually handicapped in our community has made many strides since the establishment of the School which still retains pride of place in the hearts of the people of Natal. The programme of education in this School covers a wide field: academic, practical, vocational, cultural, recreational. The fact that the pupils are blind is not important. What is important is that each child is regarded as an individual to be encouraged and guided to develop his basic inherent potential to the maximum. I should like to thank the Principal, Mr. B. C. Nursoo, and every member of the staff, both teaching and non-teaching, for their invaluable services given to the pupils at all times."

The school functions today in the same way as any other modern school for the blind and makes provision for tuition from kindergarten to senior certificate. It also devotes attention to the less gifted pupil and takes the problems which beset the partially sighted child into full account. A section for deaf-blind pupils has also been started. The school offers psychological services to its pupils, it has a mobility programme and a well-organised handicraft department. The cultural and extra-mural activities are not neglected. Music receives its rightful place in the school programme. The final results of the Senior Certificate examinations were fair, in some years better than in others. It should also be noted that several ex-pupils who took a university courses, have made a success of their careers. We mention the names of two: Zachariah M. Yacoob who at present practises as an advocate in Durban and Sivalingam A. Moodley, a teacher at the New Horizon School for the Blind in Pietermaritzburg. The fact that a large per-

tage of the teachers have already received their Diplomas in Special Education, proves that they are eager to expand their knowledge and to improve their qualifications.

### **The Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted and Preparatory School for the Blind**

In the schedule contained in the Special Education Act (Act No. 9 of 1948) which lists the categories of handicapped children for whom the Department of Union Education had to make provision, the partially sighted do not appear. Technically speaking, the Provincial Education Departments were therefore responsible for the education of partially sighted children. Little was done about this, however, except that in 1952 the Transvaal Education Department established a class at a primary school in Johannesburg. In view of the fact that there was a pressing need for this kind of education on a large scale, the Department of Education, Arts and Science appointed a committee in December 1957 to investigate the educational facilities which existed for partially sighted children of all population groups. The members of the Committee were Dr. L. van Schalkwijk (Chairman), Dr. P. E. Biesenbach and Mr V. H. Vaughan. The report of the Committee appeared in June 1958.

The Committee heard verbal evidence from various interested persons such as Medical Inspectors of Schools, Principals of special schools, Chairmen of Management Boards of special schools, and an ophthalmologist. Correspondence was conducted with educational authorities abroad, and overseas publications were consulted.

Since partial sight in children is a very wide term which indicates conditions ranging from a mild degree of visual impairment to near blindness it was the Committee's task to draw up a criterion whereby the children in this category could be admitted to a special school for the partially sighted. This was done by studying the findings of overseas authorities, ophthalmologists, and the criterion which had previously been laid down by the Inter-Departmental Committee on Deviate Children (1945). When the implications of the revised criterion were reviewed the Committee resolved to recommend that provision for the Education of the partially sighted should be transferred to the Department of Education, Arts and Science.

The Committee's recommendations were approved by all five education departments (i.e. the four Provincial Education Departments

and the Department of Education, Arts and Science), and served as a basis for the eventual establishment of separate schools for partially sighted children by the Department of Education, Arts and Science with regard to Whites, and the other education departments for the other population groups.

Shortly after the appearance of the report the Transoranje Institute for Special Education in Pretoria applied to the Department of Education, Arts and Science for approval to establish a school for the partially sighted. This was granted.<sup>3</sup> After a suitable site had been obtained the planning of the buildings were started. Mr P. J. van der Merwe was appointed Principal on 1 July 1962, but since the buildings had not yet been completed, a house was hired in Pretoria North where the school was started with 12 pupils. In July 1963 they moved to the finished part of the new school buildings. The number of pupils had increased and at the end of 1965 there were 85. The building complex which was originally designed to make provision for 225 children was completed in 1966. On 19 May 1967 the final phase of the school was officially opened by Mrs E. Verwoerd.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime Mr van der Merwe was promoted to the post of Inspector of Schools, and Mr P. P. Peach, the present Principal, was appointed. He assumed duty on 1 October 1966.

The Prinshof School for the Partially Sighted is a complete educational institution in the finest sense of the word. It makes provision for scholastic, ophthalmological, residential, cultural, guidance and recreational services to its 270 pupils. By means of a system of differential education the pupils can follow either an academic or a practical course. With regard to the academic course of study, a pupil may choose a science, a technical, a commercial, or a general course, according to his interests, aptitude and degree of sight. Specialist services are offered at the eye clinic which is manned by a nurse, two part-time ophthalmologists, and a team of optometrists who visit the school once a week.

An exceptional aspect of the education of the partially sighted child is a programme for the best utilisation of his residual sight, and sight stimulation. The most modern low vision aids, including closed circuit television, are used. The school also has a well equipped large-print printing press and a tape recording section.

The Department allows the school to accept blind children (with braille as their medium) up to Grade II — hence the rest of the name:



Preparatory School for the Blind. A new building to house this department will be opened shortly.

Mr Peach, in his capacity as Principal, keeps abreast of the newest developments in the field of education of the partially sighted. He also remains in close contact with the teaching in the classroom in addition to his administrative duties. Nevertheless he still finds time for further university study in the field of school administration. In order to expand his knowledge and to make international contacts he has already undertaken three study tours, the first in 1968, the second in 1972 when he also attended a meeting of the International Council for the Education of Blind Youth in Madrid, and in 1977 when he attended a conference of the same body in Paris. His reports which followed on the conferences were comprehensive and informative.

Mr Peach is constantly engaged in broadening his outlook, also with regard to education in general. He is the present Vice-Chairman of the Association for Vocational and Technical Training and is a member of the Joint Matriculation Board, certainly one of the most important educational bodies in this country. For a number of years he was a member of the Executive Committee of the S.A. National Council for the Blind and in that capacity has served on various committees and sub-committees. Since 1974 he has been Vice-Chairman of the Council.

### **Schools for Black blind children**

The following schools for Black blind children are affiliated to the S.A. National Council for the Blind:-

Siloe School for the Blind

Bosele School for the Blind

Vuleka School for Blind and Deaf Zulu Children.

### **Siloe School for the Blind**

This school was established in 1951 by the Roman Catholic Church at a mission station approximately 40 km south of Pietersburg. It serves the Northern Sotho population group. The White staff come from Belgium where they were trained. The Black staff can follow an in-service course introduced by the Department of Education and Training, and which leads to the obtaining of the Diploma in Special Education issued by the Department. Up to the present time nine of

the staff members have taken the course and are in possession of the diploma.

The school has 135 pupils. Provision is made for both blind and partially sighted pupils from the kindergarten class up to standard 8, although a few pupils have already passed standard 10. A great deal of attention is devoted to handicrafts. A part of the educational programme is instruction to the senior pupils in mobility and orientation.

An ex-pupil of the school, Mr J. Malatji, is an advocate who was called to the bar after he had obtained the degrees of B. Juris and L.L.B. at the University of the North. At present he is in the service of the Department of Justice of the Government of Lebowa.

The first Principal was Sister Coudenijis. After her retirement Sister Bornauw was appointed in her place. The Rev. A. van den Broucke, head of the Mission station, renders valuable service to the school and takes a special interest in the children. He was of great assistance to Mr J. Malatji during his law studies at the University of the North.

### **Bosele School for Blind Blacks**

The Bosele School for Blind Blacks was established in August 1959 by the Women's Mission Society of the Dutch Reformed Church. The School is situated in Lebowa and serves the Bapedi (Northern Sotho). It began with 4 pupils under the temporary principalship of Miss O. Morrison of the Worcester School for the Blind. The first permanent Principal was Mr C. W. Malan who assumed duty in January 1958. He was succeeded by Mr H. R. Lemmer in 1962. After Mr Lemmer's appointment as Inspector of Schools, Mr M. J. van den Berg was appointed. He is still the Principal of the school.

Academic instruction is provided up to standard six. Vocational training is given in knitting, cane and sisal work, and weaving. An important achievement of the School is the successful performance of the school choir in competition with sighted schools in the vicinity.

The number of pupils has increased to 135. Of them nearly half are partially sighted. The latter receive the form of education which is suitable for them. The School devotes much attention to sport, especially to track events.

### **Vuleka School for Blind and Deaf Zulu Children.**

Vuleka (the Zulu word for "open up") is a Mission School of the Dutch Reformed Church in Natal. It is a primary school with depart-

ments for the deaf and the blind and it is subsidised by the Department of Education and Culture of KwaZulu. It is a boarding school for Zulu children from the whole of the Republic of South Africa. Children between the ages of six and fourteen years are admitted and are allowed to stay at Vuleka until they are eighteen years of age. At present there are 70 blind and 230 deaf pupils on the roll.

The School which is situated among the hills of KwaZulu, was established in April 1962. The first Principal was Mr C. W. Malan, formerly from the Bosele School for the Blind in Lebowa. Mr I. A. Mok succeeded Mr Malan in January 1976, and still occupies the post.

The pupils are taught through the medium of braille in three languages, namely Zulu, English and Afrikaans. The School's curriculum is similar to that of any other school under the control of the Department of Education and Culture. The standard 5 pupils write precisely the same examinations as their sighted colleagues. Standard 7 was introduced at the beginning of 1977 and standard 8 in 1978. With regard to music, the boys have started their own band, and make use of instruments donated by Prince Joseph Zulu.<sup>31</sup>

Crafts include articles made from cane, sisal and phormium. Weaving is done on a small scale, and the introduction of pottery is planned for the near future. The girls also do knitting. Extra-mural activities include excursions, adapted athletics, games and social gatherings.

In addition to the usual school and hostel staff, a qualified nurse was appointed in 1977. An after-care unit for the visually handicapped and the deaf is held in prospect.

Having dealt with bodies which render services on a national level, and thereafter with the educational establishments, we now come to the third group, namely the rest of the affiliated societies.

### **Johannesburg Society to Help Civilian Blind**

We have previously mentioned the committee formed under the leadership of Mrs G. K. Nowlan which led to the establishment of the Society to Help Civilian Blind in Johannesburg in 1926. An office was opened to which homeworkers could bring their finished articles to be sold. It was realised, however, that the establishment of a workshop was essential, and in this connection Mrs Nowlan writes in the second biennial report of the National Council (1931-1932) as follows:

“The year commencing September 1929 proved a momentous one in the annals of the Society, a shop and workshop being

taken at Braamfontein, and in this small way a nucleus of the first institution of its kind in South Africa was formed, the first year's rent being paid by a generous sympathiser."

This "institution" was later named the "Institute for Blind Workers". It was sometimes confused with the Society, and in old documents of the Council it was often referred to as being the Society itself. It was really a section of the Society. It was also sometimes called the Johannesburg Institute for Blind Workers (J.I.B.).<sup>32</sup> In those days it was compulsory for all Transvaal welfare bodies to register under the Charitable Institutions (Control) Ordinance, 1926, of the Province of Transvaal. The certificate of registration, dated 4 March 1929, indicates the name of the Society as follows: "The Society to Help Civilian Blind".<sup>33</sup> The place where it is situated is mentioned, but it does not form part of the name.

Mrs Nowlan was correct in saying that the Society to Help Civilian Blind, Johannesburg, was the first to establish a workshop for the blind in this country. After the initial effort was made in a garage in Braamfontein, a major fund-raising campaign was launched. The result was that a property was bought at the corner of Frederick and Sauer Streets, Johannesburg. The building was opened on 7 April 1932 by the Mayor of Johannesburg. It housed both the workshop and the offices of the Society.

Considerable development took place during the next two years. This is reflected in the report of the Society's activities as recorded in the third biennial report of the National Council (1933-1934). Besides the manufacturing of articles made from cane which also included cane furniture, a room was equipped for the making of tennis nets. In 1934 the Aurora Club was started for recreation, as well as a braille club where braille was taught. We also read about the contemplated purchase of a house in West Turffontein, "to be used as a permanent home for aged, indigent or unemployable blind. When this is accomplished there will be an official opening at the Home which is to be named 'The Lighthouse' in June next year. This home will be the first of its kind to be established in South Africa."

It was also during this period that Miss May Rogers joined the Society as its Secretary on 1 May 1933. In addition to her valuable services to the Society, she was active in regard to matters concerning the National Council. She especially exerted herself for the introduction of a home-teaching service at the various societies for the blind. She was



the chairman of the committee which was appointed by the National Council to promote this service. The Society appointed Miss R. Valentine as home-teacher in 1947. She was one of the few trained home-teachers who were in service in this country at that time. Since then this work has been taken over by social workers.

In 1940 a property was bought in Anderson Street and a building was erected to meet all the requirements of the Society. This development was made possible by a legacy of R29 000 from the estate of Mr David Behrmann. In this connection the jubilee brochure (1976) states the following:

"The remaining finances were realised by the sale of the Sauer Street property and a dwelling which had been purchased to provide housing for the blind, but which at that stage was not required. This was believed to be the Society's first attempt to provide housing for blind people until the purchase of six houses in South Hills in 1963."

A feature of the Society's activities was the services which it rendered over and above sheltered employment. One of these was the teaching of braille to those who did not know the system, probably as a result of the fact that they had become blind at a later age. The person who started this service was Mrs V. N. Lennox, a voluntary worker. For some years she also issued a quarterly braille magazine titled: *Our Good Fellowship Journal*. Initially each edition, comprising 100 to 140 braille pages, was written by hand, and only one copy was available. This was then circulated among the readers. Later a duplicating machine was acquired, probably a crab-machine. At that time a typed "sighted" edition also appeared, of which a number of copies were duplicated. The contents of the journal consisted of news items and articles taken from the Press, but Mrs Lennox also wrote about blindness and the activities of the Society. Occasionally she sent a few typed copies to institutions and persons overseas. In this way the Christmas issue (containing festive greetings) of 1949, was sent to Sir Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of England, which elicited a personal reply from him. The letter was published in the following edition of the journal.<sup>34</sup>

Today the Nita Lennox Trophy is awarded annually to the best candidate in the English elementary braille test in memory of her.

In 1962 Mrs I. J. Lawrence joined the braille section of the Society. After her retirement from the Athlone School for the Blind she was engaged at the Helen Keller Hostel for aged blind women in Cape

Town. She taught many persons braille at the Society for a period of eleven years.

The activities of the Society expanded to such an extent that in spite of additions to Behrmanm House, the space had become inadequate, which compelled the Management Board to seek new premises on the outskirts of the city. A piece of land was bought in Roseacres, Johannesburg, and in January 1966 building was begun. The new institution, consisting of the workshop, hostels, administration block and the rehabilitation centre, was opened on 6 December 1967 by the Acting State President, the Hounourable J. F. T. (Tom) Naudé.

The man who was in charge as Manager of the Society, was Mr Leslie Jarvis who took upon himself this tremendous task and brought it to fulfilment. He was appointed as Manager in 1960 and under his guidance major developments took place. During this period also the Lions International Home for the housing of aged blind persons was established. It consists of 14 flats for single persons and 10 flats for married couples.

Mr Jarvis resigned in 1974. He served the Society excellently and played a major part in the activities of the S. A. National Council for the Blind by, amongst other duties, occupying the post of Chairman of the Committee for Rehabilitation and Employment. As has previously been mentioned, he also undertook an overseas study tour to visit and study rehabilitation centres and workshops for the blind. He was succeeded by Mr Charles Tucker who is the present Manager.

In addition to the articles made from cane the workshop developed in the direction of assembling and packaging. This included the assembling of mechanical and electrical equipment. Contracts are also undertaken for the making of grummetts for the mines and artificial flowers for firms. Furthermore, there is a steady demand for tennis nets and hammocks. Each of the five workshop sections is under the management of a blind foreman who also performs the duties of an instructor.<sup>35</sup>

### **Pretoria Society for Civilian Blind**

When the first conference was held in Bloemfontein in June 1928, the Pretoria Society for Civilian Blind had already been established, and was fairly active. In the report of the conference<sup>36</sup> the following was stated:

“Mrs Hoepner<sup>37</sup> stated that the Pretoria Committee had been

formed in July 1927. They were keeping in touch with 17 blind people in Pretoria and several others in outlying districts. The public were recognising the work. They sent the blind to Worcester for vocational training. They accepted work for the blind and disposed of their manufactures to the best advantage."

Although the Committee was formed in 1927, it appears from available information that the Society came into being in February 1928. The workshop started with four ex-pupils of the Worcester School for the Blind at 196 Esselen Street, Pretoria, in 1931,<sup>38</sup> where cane baskets and mattresses were made. Chair-caning was also done, and socks were knitted on machines. In 1935 a property in Boom Street, Pretoria, was bought, and the workshop was moved to the new premises. Mrs A. L. Moore was then President of the Society. In her reports to the National Council it appears that regular displays were held in nearby towns and at the Pretoria Show to exhibit manufactured articles, and to acquaint the public with the work of the Society. In the sixth report (1939-1940) of the National Council we read of the appointment of an instructor for the first time, and it is mentioned that a marked improvement in the quality of the work was evident. In 1945 Mrs L. Besaans was appointed President of the Society. For many years she played a significant role in welfare work for the blind. In 1954 she was elected a member of the Executive Committee of the National Council, and for several years was also a member of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.

Two important developments must be mentioned which took place during Mrs Besaans' term of office. The first was the completion of a new modern workshop in 1954, and the second was the organising of the Rehabilitation Centre on behalf of the National Council, which was established in Pretoria in 1956. Initially the Society's home-teacher was also the part-time superintendent of the Centre. In this respect the Society rendered a valuable service to the Council until the Centre was moved to Johannesburg in 1968.

A person whose name should be mentioned here is Mrs K. D. Battle who was the untiring secretary of the Society for many years. After her retirement she was elected Vice-President of the National Council.

According to a recent report of the Society to the Council, the instructor has 28 cane workers under his supervision in the workshop at the present time. A shop in Pretoria sells articles in a stall free of charge on behalf of the Society. A steady income is derived from the renova-

tion of various types of chairs. The Society also exerts itself to procure employment for blind persons in open labour. A social worker in the service of the Society serves a large area.

### **Cape Town Civilian Blind Society**

In the review of the life and work of Miss Marjorie Watson in a previous chapter, it was mentioned that under the leadership of Mrs Lilian Bowen, wife of Adv. R. W. Bowen, a committee was formed which was the nucleus of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society. On 6 September 1928 the first meeting of this committee, consisting of seven members, was held in the home of one of the members, namely Mrs Gladys le Francois, Sandown Road, Rondebosch, Cape. At the meeting it was decided to establish a society to serve the blind of the Cape Peninsula. Mrs Bowen was nominated as President and Miss Watson as Secretary. The first task of the committee was to launch a fund-raising campaign, since funds were essential for the proper functioning of the Society.

During the following year (1929) Mrs L. Benjamin took over the chairmanship of the Society. Mrs Bowen remained President and also served on the committee. Miss Lennox Rawbone was nominated Secretary and Miss Watson braille correspondent.

On 1 July 1930 a depot and workshop was opened in Bree Street, Cape Town. The workshop was also a training centre for instruction in the making of baskets, chair-caning and the knitting of socks on two knitting machines. The depot also received finished articles from home-workers, and sold them on their behalf. In the second biennial report (1931) of the Society it was stated that there were 120 persons on the register, of whom 12 received instruction in braille and 6 were workers employed in the workshop.

The annual report of 1932 mentions the progress which had been made in the workshop, where nine men were working under Mr T. Gair, the foreman-instructor. Mr Gair had received his training at the Worcester School for the Blind and later became an instructor at the Athlone School for the Blind. The report states that contracts were obtained from large firms, municipalities and the South African Railways for various types of baskets.

Mrs Vera Chamberlain was appointed as Secretary in the place of Miss Rawbone who resigned on account of ill-health. Mrs Chamberlain assumed duty in May 1932, and mainly owing to her efforts, a workshop for Coloured blind persons was begun at 37 Hanover Street,



Cape Town, where mattress making was the chief occupation.

In 1934 the depot and training centre was moved from Bree Street to Wale Street. The Society had then also started on a new project, namely the setting up of a kiosk near the New Somerset Hospital at Green Point. It was run by a blind man and his wife. In this connection the Secretary states the following in the fourth biennial report of the Council (1935-1936):

“The tea kiosk has continued to pay its way, and has proved itself a real need to the students who patronise it, and are its principal customers, and it supplies steady employment for a blind man. The Society hopes it will be possible to move the kiosk when the new hospital at Groote Schuur opens.”

In April 1936 an event of great importance took place when the Society and both workshops moved to 43 Salt River Road Salt River. The property was bought by the Society, and it has remained its headquarters up to the present day. Over the years, as the work expanded, extensions to the buildings had to be made, the most recent of which took place in 1973.

In 1936 it was decided to appoint a Manager, primarily in view of the development which would follow after the move to Salt River. He was Captain A. J. van der Byl. At that time the social services had expanded and a committee was appointed to deal with this matter. One of the members of the committee was Miss Agnes Brown (now Mrs G. S. Schermbrucker) who later went overseas to take a course in home-teaching. After her return she was appointed as the first home-teacher of the Society. It can incidentally be mentioned here that the Society received the contract for the knitting of the stockings for the Springbok team which visited New Zealand on a rugby tour in 1937.

In 1941 Mr J. J. Prescott-Smith, formerly Organising Secretary of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, was appointed Manager. He was succeeded by Mr H. V. Becker in 1951. During the latter's long term of office of 26 years tremendous expansion took place. The number of workers increased to more than a hundred. He developed the section for chair-caning by importing the parts of a certain type of chair for the workers to assemble and cane. It was such a success that the Management Board sent Mr Becker to Spain and Italy to promote the industry by means of contacts in those countries. Large developments also took place with regard to weaving.

Mr Becker played a very important part in the activities of the Na-

tional Council, and was a member of the Executive Committee for a considerable time.

During this period an important project was launched, namely the establishment of the Helen Keller Hostel for aged blind women. It has already been mentioned that the founders were Miss M. Watson, Miss A. Gillies and Miss L. Rawbone. At an early stage they received financial assistance through Mr Hymy Matthews, who is the present chairman of the Society and also its Life President.

To keep pace with the modern demands of providing services to the blind, the Society started with mobility instruction. The mobility officer is Mr Dan Davis who took the course in Johannesburg. He is the son of Mr John Davis, secretary of the Division for Coloured Blind of the National Council. In this way there is satisfactory co-operation between the Division and the Society. When Mr J. Davis does the placement, Mr D. Davis is consulted to assist with the orientation and mobility of the person in question.

Mr Becker retired in 1976 after years of fruitful service, not only to the Society, but also to the blind in general. At the time of his retirement a Cape Newspaper reported the following concerning him:<sup>39</sup>

“The Rev. H. V. Becker who was a minister of the Presbyterian Church until 1950, developed the workshop into one of the largest of its kind. He was very popular among the 120 blind workers who are there at present. He is well known in sporting circles in the Western Province, where he was, among other things the Chairman of the W.P. Tennis Union. He was also known as a boxer, boxing referee, and a rugby, tennis and cricket player. At the present time he plays bowls.” (Translated)

Mr Becker was succeeded by Mr R. W. Williams in 1976.

### **Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind**

The first body in Port Elizabeth to show an interest in the welfare of the blind was the National Council of Women. On 9 October 1928 the “National Council of Women Sectional Committee for the Blind” was formed with Mrs. R. J. Hannam as Chairman. One of the members was Mrs M. Marks who was destined to play an important role in the welfare of the blind in the Eastern Cape. Although the minutes<sup>40</sup> state that the first meeting was held on the date mentioned, there must have been stirrings before that time for Mrs Hannam had attended the conference held on 22 June 1928 in Bloemfontein for the purpose of es-

tablishing the S.A. National Council for the Blind. This happened four months earlier. Probably she attended the meeting in her personal capacity. At the second conference, held in Cape Town on 18 – 20 March 1929, she represented the committee of the National Council of Women. She took an active part in both conferences. It was she who submitted the resolution at the Bloemfontein Conference “that the time had arrived for the formation of a National Council for the Welfare of the Blind in South Africa”.<sup>41</sup> Initially the committee of the National Council of Women sold the articles made by the blind homeworkers. A sub-committee was also appointed to pay visits to blind people and to assist those in financial need.

At a meeting of the committee held on 11 June 1929 it was decided to establish an independent society. This was the beginning of the Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind.<sup>42</sup> Mrs Hannam was elected president with Mrs J. M. Simpson as secretary and Mrs Marks assistant secretary.

From then on welfare work among the blind was performed with greater purposefulness. At the annual general meeting held on 9 November 1930 it was announced that the number of blind persons on the register of the Society was 153. It was also decided at the meeting that the Society should establish its own depot and workshop.

The workshop opened its doors on 31 August 1931 at 29 Chapel Street, Port Elizabeth, where two men and one woman were employed in the making of baskets and knitted articles.<sup>43</sup>

We find that in the ensuing period as a result of the increase in the number of workers and the resulting lack of space, the workshop had to move several times. This state of affairs caused the Society to resolve that a fund should be established with a view to erecting a building which would accommodate both the workshop and the offices.

By this time Mrs Marks had become president of the Society (elected 6 November 1934) and as an indefatigable worker she succeeded, together with those who assisted her, to raise enough funds to erect a suitable building. It was occupied in March 1948 and officially opened on 27 May 1949 by the Secretary for Social Welfare, Mr G. A. C. Kuschke.

At that time another milestone was reached when Ethembeni, a workshop for blind Black persons, was opened in December 1947 in New Brighton, a township near Port Elizabeth. Mrs Marks was mainly instrumental in bringing this about. Mr H. Menta, a blind person, was appointed as instructor.

Apart from the workshop under its control the Society also deve-

loped a very effective system of social services over the years. Trained social workers are employed for this purpose.

Mr C. B. Dawe is at present the Manager of the workshop. He assumed duty in 1960. Mr. I. J. P. Meyer has been the instructor since 1954.

Mrs Marks also played an active role in the National Council. She served on the Executive Committee from 1939 to 1964 and was elected Vice-Chairman from 1950 to 1954. She died on 17 March 1966 after 37 years in the service of the blind.

### **Civilian Blind Society of the Orange Free State**

At the first Conference held in Bloemfontein in June 1928 to deliberate on the establishment of a co-ordinating body, the Orange Free State was represented by Mrs Hugh Wiley and Mr R. C. Streeten. It must therefore be assumed that a certain amount of interest existed for welfare work among the blind at that time. In an undated document found in the archives of the Civilian Blind Society of the O.F.S. we read the following statement:

“The Civilian Blind Society of the O.F.S. was formed in 1928 after a public meeting in the old Town Hall, Maitland Street, Bloemfontein, presided over by Mr Stewart Franklin, Mayor of Bloemfontein. The foundation member was Mrs Hugh Wiley, then President of the National Council of Women, whose members helped in the formation of a preliminary committee to help civilian blind. The first Chairman of the Society was Councillor R. C. Streeten.”

The first meeting of the Committee was held on 18 February 1929 with Mrs Wiley as Chairman. The Committee immediately started an extensive programme of welfare services. Its first annual meeting was held on 19 May 1931. The Committee functioned as such until 6 March 1934, when it was decided that a larger and more comprehensive organization should be created. This then was the date of the establishment of the Civilian Blind Society of the Orange Free State. Mrs Wiley was elected President.

The Society extended its welfare services to all population groups and made its activities known in the Press. Individual prevention work is being done by referring patients to hospitals for ophthalmological treatment.

In 1977 a part-time social worker was appointed. In 1978 a work-



shop for Black blind persons was established in a township near Bloemfontein where eight men and four women are working at present.

Mrs Wiley represented the O.F.S. on the National Council for a number of years. She was a member of the Executive Committee of Council for the periods 1944 – 1962 and 1966 – 1970. She died in Bloemfontein on 1 January 1971.

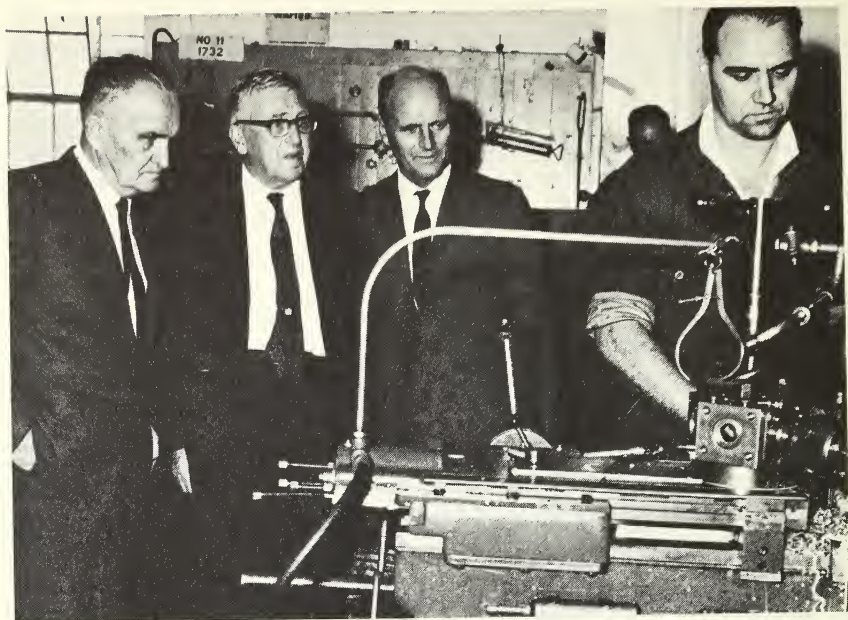
### **Workshops and Homes for the Blind, Worcester**

It is rather surprising that the Workshops and Homes for the Blind at Worcester started with blind women, in contrast with other organizations, where men were first admitted. The first blind woman arrived at the Home for Blind Women on 1 May 1933. During the following week nine more came and soon the home was filled to capacity.<sup>44</sup> Initially the chief trade was the making of socks on the round knitting machine. On 1 September 1933 Mr J. H. Hofmeyr, then Minister of Education, performed the opening ceremony.

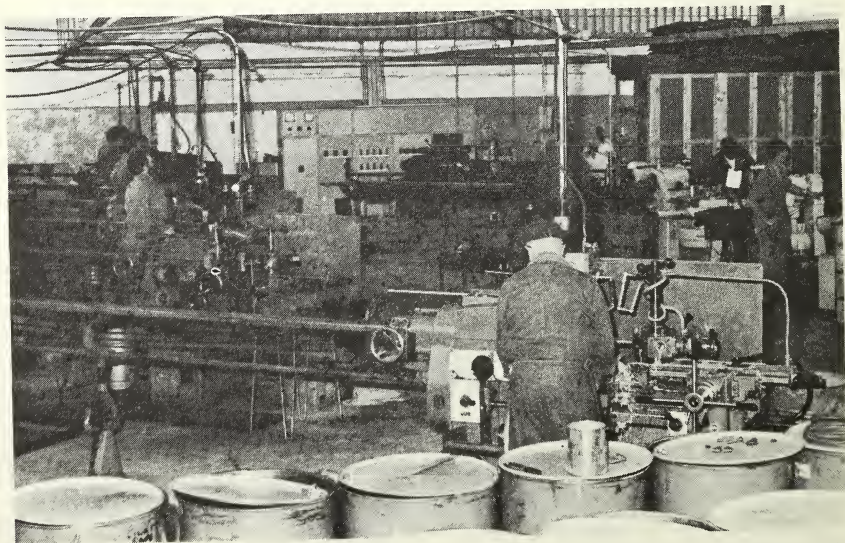
Encouraged by the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1936, the Board of Management decided to provide for men also, since the State was now empowered to provide financial assistance to such institutions in the form of subsidies. In 1938 there were 15 women and 5 men resident in the institution.

Plans were now being made for the building of a men's residence and a workshop. On 1 May 1941 the men's hostel was opened and on 2 March 1942 the workshop. After the opening ceremony, which was conducted by Ds. A. S. Cronjé, Chairman of the Board of Management, ten men started immediately with the making of mats, tennis nets and baskets, even before those who attended the function, had departed.

What had thus far been attained, was the work of Dr. P. E. Biesenbach, principal of the Worcester School for the Blind and Honorary Superintendent of the Workshops and Homes for the Blind. It was mentioned earlier that he was concerned about the economic position of the past pupils of the School, as a result of a survey he had conducted in 1929. In the years which followed, further extensions became necessary. In 1944 more than 60 blind adults were accommodated and Biesenbach foresaw that within the next decade the number would be doubled. This would also mean that accommodation would have to be provided for the different categories of blind persons such as: young



Worcester Workshops and Homes for the Blind. A historic photograph. Dr P. E. Biesenbach, founder and former Superintendent of the Workshops, Dr E. J. Waterhouse, former Director of the Perkins School for the Blind, Watertown, U.S.A., and Mr Theo Pauw, who succeeded Dr Biesenbach, watching a blind lathe-worker.



Worcester Workshops and Homes for the Blind. Machine room of the Department for Light Metal Work.

women, older women, young men, older men, married couples and the aged. In course of time this actually happened. Biesenbach realised that comfortable accommodation with a reasonable rental was the key to the happiness of the blind worker, which in turn led to increased productivity. This policy succeeded admirably. Apart from the existing homes for men and women, Biesenbach gradually started buying and building dwelling-houses, semi-detached houses and flats.

Today the Blind Institute possesses 60 residential units which are rented to the different categories of workers and their families.

In order to achieve all this, funds were needed to supplement the subsidies obtained from the State. As already mentioned, Biesenbach was an excellent administrator and businessman and he built up a very effective system of fund-raising. This was spread over the whole country because it was his view that the Institute was performing a national service. The various campaigns he launched were highly successful.

As the demands of the public and the markets changed, the workshop had to make adaptations. Biesenbach and his team of helpers were aware of this. When the spring mattress displaced the old coir mattress on the market, the workshop immediately started with the manufacturing of innerspring mattresses. The necessary machinery was obtained, but the technical knowledge still had to be acquired. For this purpose an instructor was sent to a firm in Port Elizabeth for a month, but he returned after three days. This short time was enough for him to grasp the skills required. Adjustments had to be made in the women's sections as well.

In 1961 work was started on lathes for among other things, the manufacturing of stud-bolts for the S.A. Railways. Later the making of nails was also introduced. Already in 1959 negotiations with the Railways had begun. The two persons who assisted Biesenbach and were chiefly instrumental in making a success of the project, were Mr J. S. Gericke and Mr W. Viljoen. Mr Gericke, an industrial psychologist, gathered information from an institution for the blind in Bristol, England, and also from Western Germany. He even consulted an article which was originally published in a journal in Russia. Mr Viljoen on the other hand, possessed the technical skills for the operation, as well the ability to develop the potential of the blind worker in this particular respect. It was a red-letter day when a senior official of the S.A. Railways addressed the workers to thank them for their contribution "to keep the wheels of the Railways turning". With justifiable pride



they listened to this estimation of their work which would undoubtedly motivate them for greater productivity.

As a result of the development which took place in the light metal department the Institute acquired a stand in the industrial area of the town where a factory was built.

The other activities of the workshop include the making of inner-spring mattresses, cane furniture and baskets, weaving and knitting, and the manufacture of basic wooden furniture. In the section where the multi-handicapped blind are employed simple assembly work is done such as the making of clothes pegs.

Dr Biesenbach retired in 1968 and was succeeded by Mr Theo Pauw. Mr W. Viljoen is at present Manager of the Workshops and Homes.

Mr Pauw continued the work Dr Biesenbach had begun and endorsed the policy that a certain amount of sighted labour should be used in the workshop. This combination of sighted and blind labour increases the productivity of the blind worker and makes the particular department more profitable. Furthermore Mr Pauw has removed such slogans as: "Buy from the blind" and labels such as: "Made by the blind". The finished article is placed on the market by virtue of its high quality and not because it was made by the blind.

Besides employment the Institute also renders social services, auxiliary services such as medical and nursing services and services to the aged. In connection with all these Mr Pauw makes the following statement which certainly deserves earnest thought:

"There is no specific rehabilitation programme. The facilities which are offered are in themselves rehabilitative. If you enable a man to become economically independent then you rehabilitate him . . . If you enable him to rear his children, based on a sound foundation, then you rehabilitate the whole family."

### **East London Society for the Civilian Blind**

At the foundation meeting of the National Council, held on 20 March 1929 in Cape Town, Mrs E. Kayser applied for affiliation on behalf of the "East London Provisional Committee".<sup>45</sup> Later, however, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Council, held on 14 December 1929, a further application for affiliation was dealt with. The minutes read as follows:<sup>46</sup>

"An application for affiliation from Mrs Pullen for the East London Branch of the National Council was placed before the Execu-



tive and it was decided to accept the application.”

It seems strange that the East London Society was considered a branch of the National Council until 1940. Not until the sixth biennial report of Council (1939-1940) do we find the name of the Society given as the East London Society for Civilian Blind. The Council's constitution makes no provision for the establishment of branches of the Council.

A commendable undertaking by the East London Society which deserves to be mentioned is the establishment of the Hillcoombe Holiday Home in 1946. The events which led to this have already been dealt with in a previous chapter. It is a fact that the National Council contributes financially to its maintenance but the Society is responsible for all matters relating to the administration and especially for making the visit of the guests as enjoyable as possible. From evidence received from all over, the responsible Committee has certainly succeeded admirably in this regard.

In connection with the other activities of the Society, the establishment of a Society for Bantu Blind should be mentioned. This was done as far back as 1950. The person who especially exerted herself to bring this about was Miss Enid Whitaker, also known for the part she played in establishing the Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre in Pretoria (now in Johannesburg).

For many years Mr Medicine Mketo rendered valuable welfare services to Black blind persons. At present he is training to become a qualified social worker. An important aspect of the work is assistance to patients who have to attend eye clinics.

A person whose name is still held in high esteem is Mrs E. K. Gill, foundation member of the Society and President for 25 years. It was mainly through her efforts that the Hillcoombe Holiday Home was eventually established. After her retirement she was elected Honorary Life President of the Society. She died on 14 January 1963.<sup>47</sup>

### **Natal Bantu Blind Society**

Previously in chapter one we referred to the role played by Mrs Constance Cawston of Durban in “Our Own Blind Fund Association of Natal”. She was especially active amongst the Zulus whose language she spoke. At the same time she became concerned about the lot of the Indian blind. This prompted her to establish the Natal Society for Bantu and Indian Blind. How it came about is told in the fourth bien-

nial report of the National Council (1935-1936):

“During October 1936 Mrs Gordon Cawston, recognising the need of helping the Natal Bantu and Indian Blind, commenced a general survey throughout Natal, and in January 1937 formed a representative Committee in Durban to investigate and help these people. In April 1937 this newly formed Society was affiliated with the South African National Council for the Blind, and in June 1937 became registered under the Blind Persons Act of 1936.”

Thereafter the aims of the Society were given amounting to the following: the provision of medical services, the training of the blind in various trades and the establishment of hostels and workshops.

Mrs Cawston was elected President.

In the initial years general welfare work was done which included the tracing of blind persons and the provision of ophthalmological treatment in hospitals.

In 1939 the Society was divided into two separate organizations, namely the Society for Bantu Blind and the Society for Indian Blind. The Society for Bantu Blind immediately started raising funds for the erection of a workshop. This was attained when the Constance Cawston Institution admitted its first workers on 1 January 1944 and was officially opened by the Honourable P. V. G. van der Byl on 9 September 1944. The institution is situated in Westville on the outskirts of Durban and began with 35 trainees.

The Society developed satisfactorily and in the annual report of 1957 it was stated that 80 men were employed in the workshop. In the same year a beginning was made with the admission of women, chiefly for the making of knitted articles.

Mrs Cawston continued with her visits to the remote areas of Zululand. She addressed gatherings in the Zulu language encouraging the people who needed treatment to visit the eye-clinics. She began with a system of prevention which is still today a feature of the Society.

In 1954 Mrs Cawston had to relinquish the presidency for health reasons, but still retained her interest in the Society. Later she moved to Grahamstown and died in East London in 1958. She also played an important role in the activities of the National Council, serving on the Executive Committee from 1935 to 1954. She was Vice-Chairman from 1946 to 1948.

Mr Norman Cleverley succeeded Mrs Cawston as President of the

Society from 1955. He had been a member of the Committee since 1950. Under his guidance the Society continued to develop and this was especially noticeable in the field of the prevention of blindness. As a result of deteriorating health he had to retire in 1967. He died in 1976.

In 1972 the Institution was moved to Umlazi where a large new complex, consisting of workshops, hostels and offices was erected. It is situated in KwaZulu. It was given the name Enduduzweni.

At the beginning of 1979 there were 120 men and 37 women employed in the Institution. The main products are baskets and cane furniture. The Manager is Mr J. Randles who was appointed in 1977. On the social side he strives to involve the people living in the vicinity in the activities of the institution and has achieved remarkable success. He arranges "open days" and large numbers of the public of Umlazi are keen to attend. The women of the community, at his request, came forward to assist with the organization.

### **Natal Indian Blind Society**

As mentioned earlier, the Natal Indian Blind Society began as a result of the separation of the original Natal Society for Bantu and Indian Blind into two bodies. Mrs C. Cawston was elected President of the Indian Society. Welfare work was continued, and as in the case of the Bantu Society, the ultimate aim was to establish a workshop. Hard work on the part of Mrs Cawston and her helpers resulted initially in obtaining a stand in 1944 as a gift from Mr M. A. Motala. However, when the public was approached for funds the response was so poor that the frustrated Mrs Cawston seriously considered dissolving the Society. At this stage Mr Paul Sykes who was also involved with other forms of welfare work amongst Indians, came forward and formed a new and vigorous committee. He was appointed Chairman but made it quite clear that he would only act as such until the Society was on its feet again. In 1949 Mr Kunnabiram M. Pillay was elected President, an office he held until his untimely death in 1966. In an article in *Fiat Lux*<sup>48</sup> Mr C. M. Bassa wrote about him as follows:

"He led the Society with such unflagging zeal and enthusiasm that by the time of his death, it had grown into one of the best organised and active welfare agencies in the Republic."

The aim of the Committee of the Society was threefold: the preven-

tion of blindness, the rehabilitation of blind adults, the education of blind children.

With regard to the prevention of blindness the Society co-operates closely with the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness of the National Council. Follow-up work is done by the social workers of the Society by ensuring that patients report at the clinics or hospitals. In this respect the nurse of the Division for Indian Blind renders valuable service.

With regard to the second objective namely the rehabilitation of the adult blind, the Society proceeded with its efforts to establish a workshop. Unfortunately it was found that the land which was given by Mr Motala was unsuitable for the purpose and approval was obtained for it to be sold. Much later, in 1958, a property with buildings in Lorne Street, Durban, was bought for the establishment of a workshop. After certain renovations had been completed the first workers were admitted on 1 April 1959. The State subsidies for which application had been made, were not available at that time. However, after a delay of some months they were eventually paid out. From then on the workshop grew and was placed on a sound footing. The main products are baskets and canework. A new trade introduced a few years ago is the stringing of tennis racquets for a firm.

Other activities of the Society consist of general social work, visits and assistance to the aged, the placement of the blind in open labour where possible, and the provision of opportunities for recreation.

As far as the third objective is concerned, namely the provision of educational facilities for Indian blind children, this has already been discussed.

The initial development of the rendering of services to the blind Indian community at all levels must in large measure be attributed to the drive and devotion of Mr K.M. Pillay. We conclude with an extract from a tribute paid to him by Mr Bassa which appeared in the 1966 annual report of the Society.

“Those of us who were privileged to have been associated with him in his work are aware of the innumerable sacrifices that he made in the interests of the work. . . . During the period of 18 years he had visited the home of practically every registered Indian blind pensioner in Natal, driving over hill and dale to offer a message of hope to people who until then had perhaps felt that life held no future for them.”



## **Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association**

In chapter one an account was given of the establishment and the activities of "Our Own Blind Fund Association of Natal" It was started in 1918 by J. E. Palmer. In 1920 a shoe repairing shop was opened, but the project was discontinued in 1928. Ten years later, in July 1938, a building in Convent Lane, Durban, was rented with the purpose of establishing a workshop. Through the good offices of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, London, the services of an instructor, Mr C. F. J. Grumbridge, who assumed duty on 1 November 1938, were obtained. In 1942 the name of the Association was changed to the Natal European and Coloured Civilian Blind Association. The present workshop in Umbilo Road, Durban, was opened for the workers in April 1952 while the official ceremony took place on 28 July 1952.

Mrs Gordon Cawston who joined the Association in 1921, was President from 1939 to 1948, when she resigned to devote her attention to work amongst the Black blind. Mr W. Voysey succeeded her as President. Later Mr Leonard Levey and Major G. Leonard Arthur were presidents of the Association. These two persons also played a prominent role in the activities of the National Council in the sixties. Mr Levey was second Vice-Chairman from 1958 to 1962, and Major Arthur represented Natal on the Executive Committee from 1962 to 1966.

In 1970 Mr R. L. Park, an attorney in Pinetown, was elected President, and in the same year Mr S. Sweet was appointed Secretary-Manager.

After matriculating at the Worcester School for the Blind in 1952, Mr Park was first employed as a switchboard operator. He then held administrative posts until the end of 1959. At the beginning of 1960 he enrolled as a law student with the University of Natal and at the end of 1964 he gained the degrees of B.A., LL.B. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to obtain an appointment as an articled clerk, he was eventually given the opportunity by a fellow-blind attorney in 1966. After a year he passed the set examinations and was admitted as an attorney in 1967. He started his practice in Pinetown in 1968.

A person whose name deserves to be mentioned in connection with the Society is Mrs F. Robertshaw. She joined the Association as early as 1930 and came to the present building in 1952 as Assistant Secretary. She is still in the service of the Association.

The workshop mainly produces different types of canework. There is no shortage of orders and many articles are even sold to other societies for the blind.

The Association also makes provision for the housing of the workers in two hostels, one for Whites and the other for Coloureds.

### **Transvaal Bantu Blind Society**

In the chapter<sup>49</sup> where an account is given of the life and work of Dr A. W. Blaxall, mention has already been made of the establishment in 1937 of a workshop for Black blind men in two dwelling houses in Sophiatown, then a suburb of Johannesburg. Mention was also made of the establishment of the Transvaal Bantu Blind Society. Two years later, in 1939, the workshop was moved to a farm north of Roodepoort where buildings were erected with money obtained from the public, subsidised by the State. This institution which provided for workshops as well as housing for the workers, was named Ezenzeleni. This is the Zulu word for "the place where you work."<sup>50</sup>

In 1943 a section of the workers was moved from Roodepoort to a farm 40 km north of Pretoria where buildings were available. This place was called Itereleng, the Tswana equivalent of Ezenzeleni. For a number of years the institution was divided until eventually all the workers were moved to Hammanskraal. In 1967 the last move took place, this time to GaRankuwa, Bophuthatswana, approximately 24 km from Pretoria. The new institution retained the name Itereleng.

Since its establishment 40 years ago, the Society has grown from half-a-dozen workers in Sophiatown to more than 350 men and women who are today engaged in the manufacturing of, baskets, brushes, mattresses, camouflage nets and toher articles. More than half reside in the hostels of the institution. The others live nearby in their own homes.

An important development of the past few years was the establishment of an Industrial Training Centre where suitable candidates are trained for placement in open labour. By means of different kinds of equipment they receive tuition in factory safety procedures, machine orientation, switchboard operating, braille, and mobility and orientation. This type of training is the first of its kind for blind workers in South Africa.

The Society has an effective system of social services as well as a

crèche for the children of the workers. A qualified teacher is in charge of 80 pre-school children.

The Society is governed by a Board of Management of which Mr A. Gorshel is Chairman. Mr G. Hilton-Barber is the Manager. Mr Gorshel is a prominent member of the Executive Committee of the National Council. By reason of his extensive knowledge of public affairs he is often used to advantage by the Council on committees and sub-committees.

### **Grahamstown Civilian Blind Society**

The Grahamstown Civilian Blind Society was formed at the request of the Council of the Library when it was thought advisable to make a separate organization responsible for the needs of the local people, as many were coming to the Library for help other than for reading matter. One is inclined to surmise that this custom or tradition was started by Miss Josie Wood herself when, soon after the establishment of the Library in 1919, she often gave other assistance to blind people beyond the lending of books. To substantiate this one may turn to the short account of her life and work<sup>51</sup> where reference is made to her compassion towards her suffering fellow man. However that may be, Miss Wood agreed to start such an organization and founded the Grahams-town Women's Civilian Blind Society in 1929, one of the oldest societies in the country. Much later, in 1964, it was decided to alter the name of the Society to the Grahamstown Civilian Blind Society in order to make it possible for male members to join. Miss Wood was President of the Society until her death in 1965. She was succeeded by Mrs Laurie who occupied the office until 1968. Then Miss A. Bettridge was elected and she still serves in that capacity.

The services rendered are of an individual nature. The work was initially carried on entirely by voluntary workers. The office was open once a week, when the President attended to interview anyone in need of help. In January 1978 a change came about when three welfare organizations jointly appointed a qualified social worker who had been trained at Fort Hare. The post was created through the intervention of Prof. Felix Brummer<sup>52</sup> who became Honorary Secretary of the Society in 1976. The money was kindly donated by the Rhodes Rag Fund.

As a result of the appointment of the social worker the office is open daily and the number of blind people being assisted has greatly increased.

On account of the fact that no workshop is attached to the Society, blind persons, if suitable, are sent to the Port Elizabeth workshop. The Society has also succeeded during the three year period (1976-1979) in placing three persons in open labour.<sup>53</sup>

### **Kimberley and Northern Cape Civilian Blind Society**

Already at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Council held on 25 July 1931 the possible establishment of a society in Kimberley was discussed. This was as a result of the outstanding work done by Mr C. C. Church, himself a blind person. At the meeting the Secretary reported that he had been in touch with Mr Church in connection with the forming of a society but nothing eventuated.

At the beginning of the forties the matter was again raised and at a meeting of the Executive Committee it was suggested that the O.F.S. Society be requested either to establish a society at Kimberley or to extend its sphere of activity to include the whole of the northern Cape. Nothing came of this either.

The next time the matter was discussed was when the Secretary of Council reported to a meeting of the Executive Committee, held on 7-8 March 1945, that he had visited Kimberley the previous year with the intention of establishing a society there, and he intended to repeat the visit. It was resolved (according to the minutes)<sup>54</sup> that when the Secretary visited Kimberley again, the Chairman of Council would accompany him and address a public meeting. In this connection we find the following in the eighth biennial report of the National Council (1945-1946):

“After a public meeting under the chairmanship of the Honourable the Mayor of Kimberley, Councillor Graham Eden, had been addressed by Adv. R.W. Bowen, M.P., the Kimberley and Northern Cape Civilian Blind Society was established on 14 August 1945. At a meeting held on 30 August 1945 a constitution for the Society was adopted and an Executive Committee elected.”

According to later documentation in connection with the Society, 30 August 1945 is today accepted as the foundation date of the Society.

The Rt. Rev. John Hunter, Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, was elected President of the Society. Mr J. H. Rhoda was appointed Secretary. Mrs Ivy Kros who was later destined to play an important role in the development of the Society, was a foundation member.

The services rendered were initially of an individual nature which



included material and financial assistance. Medical services were also provided. In his first report to the National Council the President of the Society made mention of problems encountered in connection with ophthalmological services on account of the fact that Kimberley received one visit per month from an ophthalmologist. Through the intervention of the Director of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness this matter was rectified, and round about 1950 an ophthalmologist set up practice in Kimberley. He later became a member of the Committee of the Society and rendered valuable services.

When Mrs Ivy Kros became Secretary of the Society in 1950, she exerted herself for the establishment of a workshop for Coloured and Black blind persons. She was an indefatigable worker and enlisted the aid of service clubs, welfare organizations, firms and individuals. Only after several years did she reach her goal and the first workers were admitted to the Ivy Kros Training Centre and Workshop for the Blind on 22 January 1962 at Alexanderfontein, about 11 km from Kimberley. The Centre was officially opened on 14 March 1962 by Mr D. McHardy of the De Beers Company. The Centre and Workshop started with 16 trainees and after a year the number had increased to 25. Unfortunately, as a result of unavoidable circumstances a few years later, she had to move the centre to other buildings at Wesselton,<sup>55</sup> also near Kimberley.

In 1966 Mrs Kros was elected President of the Society. She continued her task with the same fervour. In recognition of the work she had done on behalf of the blind she was presented with the Rotary Honorary Award by the Rotary Club of Kimberley on 23 April 1970. The citation ends as follows:

“Having followed the ideals of service that are our constant inspiration and objective, we recognise your belief in your fellow-man and we pray that you will be granted health and strength to continue your self-appointed task.”<sup>1</sup>

However, this was not to be. On 26 October 1970, a few days after her return from the 20th biennial conference of the National Council held in Port Elizabeth, she passed away.

After her death, circumstances at the Society were not as favourable as desired, mainly on account of financial problems. In 1976 Mr B. H. Leendert was appointed as Manager of the workshop. Through his diligence and with the assistance of a competent Committee the workshop today shows remarkable progress. As in the case of other socie-

ties, the Kimberley Society also started to diversify. Apart from the manufacture of cane products, a start has been made with the blending and bottling of vinegar which has proved to be a payable proposition.

### **Association for Coloured and Indian Blind**

The Association for Coloured and Indian Blind was founded at a public meeting held in Johannesburg on 22 February 1949. It is probable that a committee was appointed, for on 1 March 1949 a meeting of a committee consisting of nine members was held when Mr E. Ramsdale was elected Chairman. As early as 16 May 1949 a workshop was started and ten workers admitted. On 11 June 1949 the workshop was officially opened by the Rev. A. W. Blaxall. Since Mr E. Ramsdale was mentioned as the "initiator" of the project in the Souvenir Programme of 1966, he is generally accepted as the founder of the Association.<sup>56</sup>

According to the first annual report of the Association, Mr C. V. Keshavjee was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Association and Mr W. T. Palm appointed superintendent-manager of the workshop. In the second annual report for the year ended December 1950 Mr C. V. Keshavjee was mentioned as Chairman and Mr Ramsdale as Secretary. Here the names of two persons appear who over the years were destined to play a prominent role in the development of the Association, namely Miss J. M. Fredericks and Mr I. F. H. Mayet.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that the workshop was opened merely two and a half months after the establishment of the Society is proof of remarkable dedication, enterprise and faith. When one reads of the dilapidated condition of the building in which the workshop was situated, of the struggle to obtain the necessary State approval (and consequently the badly needed subsidy) and the financial problems of the Society, one cannot but admire the courage of the persons who were prepared to continue with the work. Furthermore, the quality of the work of the first basketmakers left much to be desired, to such an extent that their products were hardly marketable. The financial position of the Association proved to be hopeless and it became absolutely necessary to obtain the services of an instructor. With regard to this Mr Ramsdale writes as follows:

"A qualified instructor was to be appointed. Mr Hennie Swart, himself a registered blind person, was interviewed in Cape Town, told the full facts of the Association's position and was asked to come to us. Without hesitation he agreed to come, notwithstanding-

ing the fact that as with the workers and the staff, we could never be sure where his salary would come from. This did not worry him. To this day Mr Swart remains a pillar of strength and we pay due tribute to him for his contribution to the progress of the Association."

In those difficult times help arrived from other societies, both from the Witwatersrand and Pretoria. This was mainly in the form of cane which was necessary to keep the workshop going.

However, over the years the situation steadily improved and with Mr I. F. H. Mayet as Chairman the Association went from strength to strength. In 1950 a piece of land was obtained from the City Council of Johannesburg at a nominal price. After another spell of intensive fund-raising a new building was erected. On 26 April 1966 it was officially opened by the Honourable S. G. J. van Niekerk, Administrator of the Transvaal.

In the Jubilee issue of 1970 Miss J. M. Fredericks describes some of the activities of the Association. As far as ophthalmological services are concerned there is close contact with the St. John Eye-hospital. Patients are taken weekly to the hospital for treatment. In this connection Miss Fredericks mentions the visit to South Africa of Prof. D. N. T. Mascati, a prominent ophthalmologist from India. He conducted eye-clinics in Johannesburg and Durban and examined the eyes of thousands of people. The Association was instrumental in bringing him out to South Africa.

The Association has an extensive rehabilitation programme which includes the teaching of braille, the running of a social club for recreational purposes, organising visits to places of interest and the like. Later a beginning was made with training in mobility and orientation with a view to making the blind more independent.

The Chairman's report of 1975 was presented by Mr W.R. Goliath who took the place of Mr I.F.H. Mayet. (Mr Goliath is of course the well-known Chairman of the Division for Coloured Blind). A feature of the activities of the Society is the diversification which has been introduced in the workshop. Sub-contracts have been obtained for packing and assembly work as well as small contracts for the manufacture of overalls for crèches, bed sheets and curtains. The Chairman also announced that Mr C.D. Beilings had been appointed as Manager as from February 1975.

On 30 September 1977 the division of the Association into two autonomous bodies took place, namely:

Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped; and  
Transvaal Association for Indian Blind.

In the minutes of the second annual general meeting of Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, held on 16 May 1979, the Chairman, Mr W.R. Goliath, announced that the workshop and training centre would remain under the control of the organization and that all other services would be rendered as in the past.

The first annual general meeting of the Transvaal Association for Indian Blind was held on 24 March 1979. The Chairman was Mr I. F. H. Mayet with Mrs Margaret Naidoo as Secretary. Mrs K. Shah is the social worker.

The activities of the Association are predominantly directed to the rendering of welfare services to the blind Indian community. The extensive report presented by the social worker to the meeting is evidence of this. A recreational club has been formed under the guidance of Miss Shirley Watkinson.

### **King William's Town Society for Civilian Blind**

The King William's Town Society for Civilian Blind was established on the initiative of four members of the East London Society who visited King William's Town for the purpose of forming a branch of their Society. A meeting of interested persons was called by the Mayor for 22 June 1945. He acted as Chairman. It was, however, decided to establish a separate society. A committee was appointed with Mrs V. K. Fleming as chairman. Later she was elected President of the Society.

The work of the Society is mainly directed to welfare work among the Black population, as well as to the prevention of blindness.

In 1958 Themb'elihle was opened. This is a training centre and workshop for Black blind women. The chief occupation is weaving. The project was later taken over by the Ciskeian Government.

The Society renders outstanding services in the field of welfare work and the prevention of blindness. Weekly ophthalmological clinics are held which are attended by 20 to 30 patients. Reports of these are regularly forwarded to the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness in Pretoria.



## **Goldfields (O.F.S.) Society for the Blind**

The Goldfields (O.F.S.) Society for the Blind was established on 13 September 1960. The area of operation comprises the northern and north-eastern districts of the Orange Free State. The head-office is in Welkom. The rest of the province is served by the Civilian Blind Society of the O.F.S. with head-office in Bloemfontein.

The first Chairman of the Goldfields Society was Mr Louis Olivier. In 1966 he was succeeded by Mr Andries Buys who served until 1969, with an interval of one year when Mr Elmer Curry occupied the post. From 1969 Mrs R. van Aswegen has been Chairman of the Society.

From the beginning the Society directed its activities mainly to the prevention of blindness amongst the Black community in its area of operation. Close co-operation with the various hospitals was established and the services of ophthalmologists were obtained. In 1963 the Society issued a brochure on the prevention of blindness, chiefly intended for the information of school children. The latter were invited to participate in an essay competition on the subject: "My eyes, my most precious possession." Contact with the schools is still maintained.

Today the Society covers a wide field of social service amongst both White and Black communities. In January 1965 the first Black social worker was appointed. A great deal of propaganda work is being done to inform the public about the potential of the blind and the activities of the Society. In this regard it should be mentioned that Mr J. G. Pelsner, Vice-Chairman of the Society, has addressed several meetings of church organizations and service clubs. The Society has established contact with a large number of welfare bodies which are of assistance in the expansion of its services.

## **The Lighthouse Club for the Blind**

Quite a number of social and recreational clubs for the blind exist in the country today. Some of them form part of existing societies, others operate independently. In view of the fact that the Lighthouse Club for the Blind, with the Cape Peninsula as its area of operation, has a wider programme than merely the social aspect, a brief outline of its activities is indicated.

The Club was established in 1937 and gained momentum in 1956 when Mr G. S. Schermbrucker became its Chairman. This has already

been mentioned in the review of his life and work. A feature of the Club is the admission of both sighted and blind as members. In this way the integration of the blind is promoted.

Apart from its cultural and recreational activities, the Club is intensively engaged in the placement of blind persons in open labour. In this respect it co-operates closely with the Division for Coloured Blind.

On the recreational side the Club organises motor rallies, excursions for its members and indoor games. There is also a section for Black blind where among other things material assistance is given.

The Club serves an excellent purpose and plays a significant part in the lives of its members.

### **Transvaal Parent Association of the School for the Blind, Worcester**

This organization was established on 6 July 1976 to strengthen the bonds between parents of pupils of the School and the School itself, and also among the parents. Regular gatherings are held, when the Principal or some other knowledgeable person delivers addresses on relevant subjects.

### **Transvaal Association for Blind Black Adults**

The aim of this organization is to render welfare services on a broad front to blind Black persons. These include general advice on matters such as insurance, business projects and hire purchase contracts. Another objective is to take the blind person out of isolation and to teach the newly blinded to make the necessary adjustments. The aims of the organization are praiseworthy. The head-office is at 1033 Klipspruit Township, Orlando, near Johannesburg.

### **Everest Club**

The Everest Club was established in Port Elizabeth on 15 November 1978 at a gathering which was addressed by Mr W. P. Rowland, Director of the S.A. National Council for the Blind.

In the first instance the Everest Club is a social club providing for recreation by means of indoor games. Its additional objective is to render services to the blind which could be considered supplementary to those already rendered by other organizations, such as placement, mobility training and participation in bowls, by means of co-operation with the various bodies responsible for these activities. It is the intention to form similar clubs in neighbouring towns.

## **The Mobility Association of South Africa**

"In March 1978 the S.A. Guide-dogs Association for the Blind organised a conference for Mobility Instructors and at this conference it was decided to form a professional body of Instructors encompassing the entire field of mobility – orientation and mobility, guidedogs and sonic devices."<sup>58</sup>

There are two types of membership: full membership and associate membership. Full membership is awarded to persons who have qualified at a training institution recognised by the Association. Associate membership is open to all persons who have special interest in mobility for the visually handicapped. At present the Association has 19 full members and 27 associated members. Biennial conferences are held.

### **Associated organizations**

**The following organizations have associate membership with the National Council.**

Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging, Cape Town

Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, Pretoria

Algemene Kommissie vir die Diens van Barmhartigheid, Pretoria

Association for the Handicapped in South West Africa, Windhoek, S.W.A.

Association of Chambers of Commerce of South Africa, Johannesburg

Chamber of Mines of South Africa, Johannesburg

Efata Welfare Organization, Umtata, Transkei

Girl Guides Association of South Africa, Edenvale, Transvaal

Jane Furse Memorial Hospital, Via Middelburg, Transvaal

Lions International, Multiple District 410, Constantia, Cape Province

Mfesane, King William's Town

Natalse Christelike Vrouevereniging Pietermaritzburg

National Association for Blind Bowlers, Johannesburg

National Council for the Care of Cripples in South Africa, Johannesburg

National Council of Catholic Women's League, Johannesburg

National Council of Women of South Africa, Bloemfontein

National War Memorial Health Foundation, Johannesburg

N.G. Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika, Worcester

Ned. Herv. Kerk van Afrika, Pretoria

Ned. Herv. Sustersvereniging, Pretoria  
 Ondersteuningsraad, Braamfontein, Johannesburg  
 Ophthalmological Society of South Africa, Johannesburg  
 Oranje-Vrouevereniging, Bloemfontein  
 St. Dunstan's (South Africa), Howard Place, Cape Town  
 St. John Ophthalmic Foundation, Johannesburg  
 South African Association of Occupational Therapists, Cape Town  
 S.A. Federated Chamber of Industries, Pretoria  
 S.A. National Council for Child Welfare, Johannesburg  
 S.A. National Council for Mental Health Johannesburg  
 S.A. National Council for the Aged, Cape Town  
 S.A. National Council for the Deaf, Braamfontein, Johannesburg  
 S.A. Optometric Association, Pretoria  
 S.A. Vrouefederasie (Head Office), Pretoria  
 Tshilidzini School for the Deaf, Shayandima  
 Union of Jewish Women of South Africa, Johannesburg

<sup>1</sup> Clause 6(a) and (b) of the constitution.

<sup>2</sup> Clause 9(a)(iii) of the constitution.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 13.

<sup>5</sup> Much has already been written about the Library in professional and lay publications. J. Bekker submitted a dissertation to the University of South Africa in 1973, with the object of obtaining the degree M. Bibl. on the subject: "Library Services to the Blind in South Africa" in Afrikaans.

<sup>6</sup> A braille volume does not represent a book. Braille requires much more space than sighted print. An ordinary novel takes up the space of from three to five or more braille volumes. The Afrikaans Bible is printed in 38 braille volumes.

<sup>7</sup> Braille Services is a department of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization which produces braille literature.

<sup>8</sup> Moon is a system of raised printing which was devised by Dr William Moon, a blind man in England. It was developed to help elderly blind persons who could not learn braille. The first book in Moon was printed in England in 1847. A "Moon Society" exists in England for the promotion of the system and the provision of funds for the printing of Moon.

<sup>9</sup> This was the designation by which Miss Wood was known. The post of librarian included the secretarial work of the Library Board.

<sup>10</sup> Johan Bekker: *Library Services to the blind in South Africa*, page vi (foreword). Dissertation for the M.A. degree submitted to the University of South Africa 1973.

<sup>11</sup> Annual report of the S.A. Library for the Blind, 1977-1978, page 3.

<sup>12</sup> Mr Schwartz was a founder member of the S.A.B.W.O.

<sup>13</sup> S.A.B.W.O. Jubilee edition, page 26.

<sup>14</sup> This was written in 1971.

<sup>15</sup> This is the total number of braille pages. The number of masters of which copies were printed, was 40 872, according to the annual report.

<sup>16</sup> Biesenbach, P.E.: *The Blind Institute at Worcester*, 1945, pages 177-184. Unpublished thesis for the degree D. Ed. of the University of Stellenbosch.

<sup>17</sup> In contrast with braille in which the letters consist of raised dots, line letter writing is a system of raised lines. Formerly quite a number of these systems existed, of which the best known was the Boston Line Letter of America. They were all subsequently replaced by braille.

<sup>18</sup> *Woordeskat en Woordherhaling: Vocabulary and Word Frequency* - (translated)

<sup>19</sup> V. H. Vaughan: *Verslag van ondersoekingswerk in verband met die opstel van Standaard Afrikaanse braille*, October 1934, page 17. Translation: - *Report on an Investigation for the Establishment of Standard Afrikaans Braille*. The present writer often held discussions with Mr Aucamp on the



question of the frequency of words in Afrikaans. Mr Aucamp was engaged in devising a shorthand system in Afrikaans at that time.

<sup>20</sup> Mr Vaughan was Inspector of Special Education at the time.

<sup>21</sup> Information obtained from the Cape Town Diocesan Magazine of 15 October 1941, in possession of the Athlone School for the Blind, Bellville.

<sup>22</sup> The school was named after the Earl of Athlone, then Governor General of the Union of South Africa, and not after the suburb of Athlone where the house in which the school was started, is situated. The fact that the school was begun in Athlone, is coincidental.

<sup>23</sup> Seventh annual report of the School, in possession of the Athlone School for the Blind.

<sup>24</sup> This information was obtained from the annual reports (1972 to 1977) of the School.

<sup>25</sup> The Executive Committee of the National Council appointed Mr Solms as the reviser of the English text of this historiography. By virtue of his excellent knowledge of the English language, (he is in possession of a M.A. degree) he has rendered valuable service.

<sup>26</sup> This committee was appointed in 1942 by the then Minister of Education, the Honourable J. H. Hofmeyr, to investigate the position of "deviate children" of all population groups, and to make recommendations with regard to their education. Volume I appeared in 1945, and Volume II in 1950.

<sup>27</sup> Later, at the beginning of 1968, when the school was moved to Pietermaritzburg, the name was changed to the New Horizon School for the Blind.

<sup>28</sup> Information obtained from a treatise which Mr N. Naidoo, at present Vice-Principal of the New Horizon School for the Blind, Pietermaritzburg, was engaged in writing with the object of obtaining an M.Ed. degree.

<sup>29</sup> Special education for Indians fell under the control of the Administration of Coloured Affairs for one year (April 1961 to March 1962). The latter took over the control from the Department of Education, Arts and Science at that time.

<sup>30</sup> Wife of the former Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa - Dr H. F. Verwoerd.

<sup>31</sup> Information obtained from the report submitted to the National Council by the School.

<sup>32</sup> This is possibly the origin of the letters J.I.B. on the Chairman's gavel which Mrs Nowlan on an occasion presented to the Chairman of the Council, Adv. R. W. Bowen. The writer was present and well remembers the incident.

<sup>33</sup> The certificate is in possession of the Society. A copy was kindly given to the present writer by Mr C. B. Anderson. It is a historical document.

<sup>34</sup> Some of the copies are in the archives of the National council, also the one containing Mr Churchill's letter.

<sup>35</sup> Jubilee brochure, 1976, page 6.

<sup>36</sup> Care of South Africa's Blind: Report of conference held in Bloemfontein, 22 June 1928, page 6.

<sup>37</sup> Mrs T. Hoepner was the Pretoria representative.

<sup>38</sup> Biennial report of Council (1946-1947) page 61.

<sup>39</sup> Biennial report of Council (1931-1932) page 46.

<sup>40</sup> Die Burger, December 1976.

<sup>41</sup> These are the minutes of the first meeting of the Committee. They are in the possession of the Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind.

<sup>42</sup> Report of the first Conference of "Workers amongst the Blind", held in Bloemfontein on 22 June 1928.

<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that the word "Civilian" did not appear in the name of the Society, as in the case of practically all the societies established at that time. Later however "Civilian" was added in brackets.

<sup>44</sup> Report of the Port Elizabeth Society to the National Council for the period 1976-1979.

<sup>45</sup> Biesenbach, P.E.: The Blind Institute at Worcester, 1945. Unpublished thesis, page 443.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the inaugural meeting of 20 March 1929. Minute book, page 17.

<sup>47</sup> Minutes of Executive Committee meeting held 14 December 1929. Minute book, page 28.

<sup>48</sup> Imfama, March 1963, page 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Fiat Lux*, monthly publication of the Department of Indian Affairs, April 1971, page 13.

<sup>50</sup> Chapter 13.

<sup>51</sup> A. W. Blaxall: The Battle for Light, page 6.

<sup>52</sup> Chapter 13.

<sup>53</sup> Prof. Brummer was formerly Deputy Secretary for Social Welfare.

<sup>54</sup> The above information was obtained from the report of the Society which was drawn up for publication in the 24th Biennial Report of the National Council.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes of Executive Committee meeting held 7-8 March 1945, page 17.

<sup>56</sup> Imfama, February 1971, page 17.

<sup>56</sup> The above information has been obtained from three sources:

- (i) First Annual Report and Balance Sheet, year ended 31 December 1949.
- (ii) Souvenir Programme, opening of New Training centre and Workshop, 26 April 1966.
- (iii) Annual Report, 31 December 1970 (Silver Jubilee)

<sup>57</sup> Miss Fredericks later became Treasurer and Mr Mayet Chairman of the Society.

<sup>58</sup> Report of the Association to the National Council for inclusion in 24th biennial report.

## *ADDENDUM*

This addendum consists of two sections which can be considered supplementary to the history of the S. A. National Council for the Blind. In the first section the names are given (with short notes) of those persons who have received the R. W. Bowen Medal. The second section deals with the achievements of a few blind persons from the past. If one takes into consideration the fact that they were able to achieve success without the organised programmes we have for the blind today, they should be appreciated and respected even more. It is therefore our duty to remember them with the gratitude they deserve.

### **SECTION A**

#### **Recipients of the R. W. Bowen Medal**

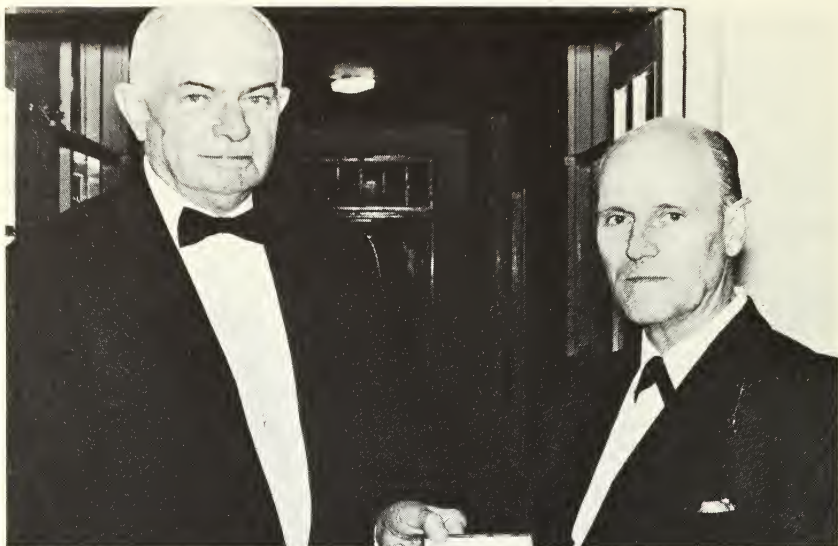
The following persons have been awarded the R. W. Bowen medal:

- 1962 — Miss J. E. Wood
- 1965 — Mrs F. M. Blaxall
- 1968 — Dr P. E. Biesenbach and Mr C. W. Kops
- 1970 — Dr Ella Botes
- 1971 — Dr Esther Franks
- 1973 — Mr S. K. Wentworth (posthumously)
- 1974 — Dr V. H. Vaughan
- 1976 — Mr C. B. Anderson

Awards will be made to three persons at the end of 1979, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the National Council. They are the following:

- Dr W. Cohen
- Mr C. M. Bassa
- Mr H. Matthews.

The majority of the above have already received the necessary attention. We shall therefore confine ourselves to the rest.



Mnr. C. B. Anderson, President of the S.A. National Council for the Blind, receives the R. W. Bowen Medal from Mr Theo Pauw, Chairman.



Dr Esther Franks, member of the Bureau Committee and recipient of the R. W. Bowen Medal.



Mr Theo Pauw, Chairman of the National Council, presents the R. W. Bowen Medal to Dr Ella Botes.



### **Mrs F. M. Blaxall**

The name of Mrs F. M. Blaxall has already been mentioned several times in connection with services to the blind. As wife of the Rev. A. W. Blaxall she was appointed matron at the Athlone School for the Blind soon after its establishment. Her next teaching assignment came after the founding of the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf near Roodepoort where she (for the first time in South Africa) started with the education of the deaf-blind. Her first pupil was Radcliff Dhladhla. Mrs Blaxall will however be remembered for the huge task she performed in connection with the Palmer Eye Hospital, of which she was matron at one time. We have already dealt with this. In connection with prevention of blindness it should be mentioned further that for many years she was an active member of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness.

She lives in England and is still keenly interested in the affairs of the National Council.

### **Mr C. W. Kops**

Mr C. W. Kops made an important contribution to welfare work for the blind on various levels. For many years he served on the Committee of the Transvaal Society for Non-European Blind – as a member of the Committee, as Treasurer and as Chairman. In this period he played an important role in connection with surveys which were conducted of the incidence of blindness among the Black population of the western parts of the Transvaal. The surveys eventually led to the establishment of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness of the National Council. He was also a member of the Board of Management of the Society to Help Civilian Blind, Johannesburg.

During his period of membership of the Executive Committee of the National Council, he rendered valuable service in connection with amendments to the constitution which had become necessary. His administrative knowledge was invaluable in this respect. He will be remembered as a clear thinker and devoted worker in the cause of the blind.

### **Dr Ella Botes**

The R. W. Bowen medal was awarded to Dr Ella Botes for the outstanding services which she, as a South African, rendered in the field of the education of the blind in the present Zambia.

As early as 1912 she left for the mission field of Central Africa and in the beginning taught at normal colleges where teachers were trained.

In connection with her work as founder and principal of the School for the Blind at Magwero, Imfama writes as follows.<sup>1</sup>

“In 1929 Dr Ella Botes established the first school for the blind at Magwero, a mission station in the present Zambia near the border with Malawi. She was principal, teacher, station superintendent, architect, builder, farmer, nurse, business manager and spiritual leader. She became a well-known personality in Central Africa. She gained international recognition for her work with the blind which she herself did not seek by virtue of her inherent humility.”.

She received many tributes for the enormous task which she had performed in Africa. In 1947 King George VI personally presented her with the M.B.E. in Livingstone. In 1962 the University of the O.F.S. conferred on her the honorary degree of D.Ed. She died on 31 October 1971 in Bloemfontein at the age of 86.

### **Dr Esther Franks**

The R. W. Bowen medal was awarded to Dr Esther Franks at a function which was held in Johannesburg on 28 January 1971 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. It was a suitable occasion since Dr Franks was a prominent pioneer ophthalmologist in connection with the restoration of sight and the prevention of blindness. As early as 1941 she had conducted surveys to determine the eye conditions among the Black population in the remote areas of the Transvaal. She was actively involved with the Bureau since its inception. When the mobile unit was launched in Pretoria in 1952 she accompanied it on its first ophthalmological tour, and she performed the first operation in the unit. In 1972 she was voted “Woman of the Year” by the readers of a Johannesburg newspaper. She died on 22 June 1972.

## **SECTION B**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS OF BLIND PERSONS**

#### **Dr Pieter de Bruyn**

Dr Pieter de Bruyn was for approximately 15 years the blind doctor of Van Rhynsdorp. Nothing could be obtained in print about him, but we were fortunate to find a few persons who were able to supply infor-

mation about his life and work. The first was Mr Ewert Rood, a nephew who lives in Cape Town. According to him Dr De Bruyn was born in the district of Beaufort West in 1886. When still a young boy he lost an eye in an accident. After matriculation he left for Edinburgh (Scotland) to study medicine. After his return he practised at Prieska. One day when he was mixing medicine (in those days the doctors had their own private pharmacies) a bottle burst and some of the splinters penetrated his sound eye. He had to travel by train to Cape Town for treatment but the eye could not be saved. He returned to Prieska but became very depressed. A relation advised him to change his locality and then to continue with his practice. He moved to Van Rhynsdorp, where he lived until his death in 1928.

With regard to his practice, Mr Rood relates that he had different young men at times to drive his car and to read the patients' temperatures. They also assisted him in different ways. In other respects he practised like any normal doctor. For all those years he was the only doctor in Van Rhynsdorp and was often called to neighbouring towns by colleagues for consultation.

Another person who is full of praise for him and speaks highly of him as a doctor is Mrs Camphausen of Pretoria. She knew him well. He attended her in her confinement and the delivery of two of her children. She tells us that he was a very popular figure in Van Rhynsdorp.

The third person from whom we were able to obtain information about Dr De Bruyn was Miss Mary Spurling of the S. A. Library for the Blind. He was a regular reader and once wrote to Miss Wood telling her how he enjoyed reading especially on long and tiresome journeys into the district to visit patients. The notice of his death, which occurred in 1928, is pasted in a book of newspaper cuttings which is kept in the Library.

### **Mr Piet Kruger**

Johannes Petrus Kruger, born on 23 November 1872, was from Transkei. He was the youngest of three blind brothers. He was 18 years of age when he was first admitted to the Worcester School for the Blind in July 1891. Five years later, in July 1896, he had passed Std. 6 as well as the examination for the Third Class Teachers' Certificate. He did the course at the local girls' school. He was subsequently appointed as a teacher at the Worcester School for the Blind.

He went on two overseas study tours. In 1905 he attended a con-

ference on the education of the blind in Edinburgh, Scotland. At first the shipping company refused to allow him on the boat because he was a blind man travelling alone. The Captain of the "Armadale Castle" however took personal responsibility for his well-being. After the conference he visited several schools and also learnt how to use the round knitting machine to make socks. He brought the machine back and instructed the blind pupils in the use of it.

He travelled mostly by himself. Dr Alfred Hollins, the well-known British blind musician, writes this about him:

"He was one of the cleverest and keenest blind men I ever met."

Hollins relates how Kruger was able to locate his home which was three kilometres from where Kruger stayed, although he had never been in London before.

In 1911 he went to England once more to attend a conference in Exeter. On this occasion he also visited a school for the blind in Amsterdam.

Kruger was a man of great perseverance and drive. As a teacher he was an excellent disciplinarian.

He died on 14 August 1921 at a comparatively early age.

### **Mr J. R. Fuchs**

Mr J. Raymond Fuchs was born in 1905. After the completion of his school career at the Worcester School for the Blind in 1926, he had a fervent desire to do mission work amongst Coloured people. He studied theology on his own and was appointed as a mission worker in the Hanover Street mission parish in Cape Town. Later he was also employed by the Armesong-kommissie of the Dutch Reformed Church, to work in the parishes of Woodstock and Salt River. He also did mission work in Knysna and Somerset West. From 1942 to 1951 he was engaged in social work with the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society. He subsequently entered the business world and bought and sold property. This was also the time when he entered public life, for he was elected a member of the Municipality of Goodwood in 1948. Four years later, in 1952, he was elected Mayor of Goodwood. He was re-elected annually until 1955. He served on various bodies. In 1952 he was appointed to the Southern City Hospital Board. For many years he was a member of the Rent Board and also of the Road Transportation Board. At one time he served on the Executive Committee of the Association of Mayors of the Cape Province. He received the award of



“Vriend van die Voortrekkers” for his services to this youth organization while he was Mayor of Goodwood.

Mr Fuchs has wide interests. He is a keen student of world politics and human relations. He was at one time the Chairman of the S.A. Blind Workers Organization and for several years served on the Executive Committee of the S. A. National Council for the Blind.

### Mr John Tennant

Mr J. S. Tennant is considered to be the first blind man in South Africa to have obtained a university degree. The graduation ceremony which took place in 1933 was held at the Grey University College, Bloemfontein, which was then still under the auspices of the University of South Africa. Tennant was probably also the first blind person to teach at an ordinary school.

In an article which probably appeared in the Cape Argus of Cape Town in 1934, an account is given of the problems he encountered when studying for his degree. The caption reads: “Overcoming Life’s Handicap”<sup>2</sup> and appeared under his own name. In a preamble a brief sketch of the years of his youth is given.

John Sydney Tennant was born in Ermelo, Transvaal, the son of Mr and Mrs S. D. Tennant. He had weak sight since birth but was able to cope in an ordinary school until the end of standard four. From then onwards he received tuition from his mother who was a qualified teacher. His eyesight deteriorated to such an extent that in 1926 he started learning braille. In 1930 he obtained the matriculation certificate. He then took a correspondence course with the object of writing the examinations for the B.A. degree of the University of South Africa, Pretoria.

In the article he mentioned the subjects he took for the degree course and the procedures he followed for studying. The subjects were: English, History, Logic, Psychology, Native Law, Latin and Geology. A science subject was probably compulsory. He experienced little difficulty with the subjects excepting geology. In this connection he writes:

“The geology was very interesting and perhaps people would like to know how I set about identifying rocks and minerals. It depended on four senses — one of which, perhaps, was only a part of the sense of feeling. The four were taste, smell, feel and ‘bite’. It depended tremendously on my test of the hardness of subs-

tances by drawing them gently over the point of one of my canine teeth."

Naturally the problem of the availability of books in braille arose. He paid a warm tribute to the S.A. Library for the Blind which took great trouble to obtain books, and to arrange for books to be transcribed by hand for him. He also borrowed books from the National Students Library in London on long-term loan. He mentions *inter alia* that the S.A. Library transcribed a book for him "on the drawing of geological maps with diagrams."

After obtaining the B.A. degree he was appointed to a post as teacher of history and Afrikaans on the staff of the African Native Mission School at Modderpoort, near Bloemfontein.

Little information could be obtained about his later life. It is known, however, that he returned to Ermelo afterwards, where he gave private lessons. He also took a keen interest in the Scout movement.

He died in Ermelo in the late fifties.

### **Cantor Abraham Immerman**

As Cantor in a Cape Town Synagogue and also a man with a remarkable memory. Abe Immerman has become a legendary figure in his own lifetime. He was born blind in Matiland, Cape Town, in 1907. His father died in an accident before his birth. His mother married again and the family moved to Zastron in the O.F.S. His mother died when he was five years old, but his stepfather and stepmother (his stepfather married again) were very kind to him. The Rabbi of Zastron, Rev. S. J. Josefowits, taught him the services and parts of the Bible which he memorised. When he was 13 years of age he could conduct a full service.

In 1922, when he was 15, he was admitted to the Worcester School for the Blind where he was taught English, Afrikaans, braille and typewriting. After three years he left the school and entered the service of the Jewish faith. He returned to Zastron and the Rabbi suggested that he should tour the country and hold services in towns where there were no synagogues. After travelling about for eight months he decided in 1927 to settle for the time being in Oudtshoorn. Here he learnt all the texts by heart which were necessary for the most important Jewish festivals. He took three months to do this. From Oudtshoorn he occasionally visited Cape Town and eventually settled there in 1942. He then started to prepare youths for the Barmitzvah. At pre-

sent he also teaches singing and religion at the Herzlia School.

As far as his remarkable memory is concerned, it is stated that he can immediately name the day on which a certain date falls. In this connection Imfama writes as follows:

"What he can do with dates is but one manifestation of a rather special kind of brain and an extraordinarily prodigious memory. Working out dates, he told me, was but a hobby, a sort of mental exercise. And how he works them out is his secret."

In 1976 he celebrated his jubilee in the service of South African Judaism. A fund was opened in Cape Town on his behalf, but he refused to accept any of it. It was subsequently used for bursaries at an institution for the blind in Israel and at the Herzlia School. By reason of this benevolence his name was inscribed in the Golden Book, the Jewish National Fund book in Jerusalem.

There are at present several blind persons in South Africa who have made their mark and risen to great heights in their respective fields. We have selected the above few because they form part of the past and therefore also an appropriate part of this history.

<sup>1</sup> Imfama, June 1971, page 8.

<sup>2</sup> This article was found in a book of newspaper cuttings which was kept by Mrs Agnes Scherbrucker on the activities of the Cape Town Civilian Blind Society.

<sup>3</sup> Information for this section was obtained from Imfama, March 1964, page 7, and Imfama, August 1976, page 16.

# INDEX

## *(Persons and Organizations)*

- Adams, P. 332  
 Anderson, C. B. 92, 240, 289, 291, 368-371, 455  
 Archery, M. S. 321  
 Armitage, Sir T. 92  
 Arthur, Major G. L. 216, 441  
 Arthur Blaxall School for the Blind 315, 416  
 Association for Coloured and Indian Blind 315, 317, 322, 327, 332, 446-448  
 Athlone School for the Blind 1, 27-29, 39, 55, 64, 101, 105, 140, 149, 335, 346, 410-415  
 Aucamp, Miss C. E. 166, 245, 393, 395, 396, 406  
  
 Bam, Rev. P. 398  
 Barnes, F. G. 36, 42  
 Bassa, C. M. 260, 261, 262, 314, 315, 316, 320, 321, 324, 329, 322, 418, 439, 455  
 Battle, Mrs K. D. 240, 427  
 Beacon Club 335  
 Becker, H. V. 233, 429, 430  
 Beilings, C. D. 339, 447  
 Besaams, Mrs T. 427  
 Besselaar, M. J. 6-7, 11, 13, 16, 35, 258, 405  
 Benjamin, Mrs L. 33  
 Bettridge, Miss A. 443  
 Biesenbach, Dr P. E. 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 35, 48, 57, 60, 66, 91, 94, 105, 116, 118, 147, 149, 182, 205, 206, 258, 270, 276, 404, 405, 406, 408-409, 419, 455  
 Biesenbach, G. H. 259, 404  
 Blaxall, Dr A. W. 20, 27, 29, 32, 33, 35, 37, 45, 49, 57, 64, 66, 140, 147, 149, 170, 171, 176, 200, 202, 224, 240, 258, 259, 279, 280, 284, 286, 289, 343-347, 415  
 Blaxall, Mrs F. M. 171, 260, 286, 411, 416, 457  
 Bowen, A. J. 142  
 Bowen, Mrs L. 42, 53, 137  
 Bowen, Adv. R. W. 35, 36, 37, 42, 43 49, 56, 57, 66, 67, 79, 80, 99, 105, 109, 111, 134-145, 147, 148, 254, 276, 444  
 Bornauw, Sr. 422  
 Boshoff, Dr P. 286, 400  
 Botes, Dr E. 266, 457  
 Botha, P. R. 28, 411  
 Braille Services 245, 357, 393  
 Brown, Miss A. 91, 92, 226, 429  
 Brummer, Prof. F. 443  
 Butler-Smith, Mrs L. C. 111, 113, 253  
 Buys, A. 449  
  
 Cairns, Miss C. 233, 234  
 Campbell, G. 234, 235  
 Cape Town Civilian Blind Society 1, 29, 55, 88, 91, 92, 92, 94, 100, 107, 117, 119, 121, 131, 336, 428-430  
 Cape N.G.K. Synod 3, 4, 16  
 Carlse, H. 317, 339, 398  
 Cawston, Mrs C. 20, 21, 66, 111, 125, 131, 147  
 Church, C. C. 36, 37, 47, 118  
 Cilliers, A. B. 413  
 Clarendon, Earl 70, 99  
 Cleverley, N. 172  
 Coloured Affairs, Dept. of 412  
 Coloured Blind, Division of 332-340, 398  
 Cohen, Dr W. 112, 121, 163, 164, 169, 171, 195, 209, 210, 212, 213, 238, 239, 249, 255, 260, 261, 264, 268, 269, 289, 314, 321, 351-358, 391, 400, 455  
 Comber, Miss E. 21, 23, 365  
 Coudenijis, Sr. 422  
 Cronje, J. J. 406, 407  
 Cruse, P. 9  
 Currey, Miss M. H. 28, 29  
 Cutten, T. 194, 213, 214, 349



Davis, D. 430  
 Davis, J. W. 234, 336, 337, 430  
 Deaf and Blind Institute 2, 3, 4, 6, 55  
 De Bruyn, Dr P. 458-459  
 De Klerk, C. 233  
 De la Bat, B. J. G. 3, 4, 7, 13, 258  
 De Villiers, Prof. J. J. 235  
 De Villiers, P. J. A. 390  
 Du Toit, Miss C. C. 94  
  
 East London Society for the Blind  
 Education, Arts and Science 94, 157, 163, 165,  
 168, 172, 406, 415, 419  
 Ellis, J. E. 193, 194, 213, 215, 217  
 Enid Whitaker Rehabilitation Centre 179-191,  
 267  
 Erwee, Miss J. (Mrs Bennett) 11, 187  
 Evans, Mrs G. 357, 398  
 Evans, D. 398  
 Everest Club 450  
 Ezenzeleni 347, 353  
  
 Fleming, Mrs V. 149, 171, 182, 448  
 Fourie, Min. A. P. J. 79, 80  
 Fourie, Dr J. J. 256, 261, 338  
 Fournier, Dr M. N. 296  
 Francis, R. 309  
 Franks, Dr. E. 286, 291, 458  
 Franks, Dr M. 289  
 Fredericks, Miss J. M. 317, 318, 334, 446  
 Fuchs, J. R. 122, 393, 460-461  
  
 Gaum, H. A. 309  
 Gericke, J. S. 408, 435  
 Geyer, Miss E. J. 94, 184, 186  
 Gie, Dr S. F. N. 49  
 Gill, Mrs E. K. 437  
 Gillies, Miss A. F. 53, 142, 144, 158, 191, 193,  
 195, 203, 218  
 Gillies, Miss E. L. (Mrs Bowen) 137  
 Gillies, Sir Harold 137  
 Godlonton, M. G. 24  
 Gakool, H. 315, 321, 324  
 Goliath, W. R. 315, 317, 334, 335, 339, 340-  
 342, 447  
 Goodfellow, A. 217  
 Gordon, Dr T. D. 278  
 Gorshel, A. 265, 268, 443  
 Greenwood, Mrs E. 13, 47  
 Greenwood, Mr H. 9, 226

Grippin, Mrs 27  
 Grumbridge, C. F. J. 270, 441  
  
 Hannam, Mrs R. P. 33, 36, 37, 40, 43  
 Harris, Dr W. 294  
 Health, Dept of 58, 69, 125, 275, 278, 293, 294,  
 299, 302  
 Hettasch, H. G. 270  
 Heuvel, T. 27  
 Hildenbrand, Dr T. 295  
 Hillcombe Holiday Home 25, 127, 181  
 Hilton-Barber, G. 239, 273  
 Hoepner, Mrs T. 36, 40  
 Hofmeyr, Min. J. H. 66, 70, 413, 433  
 Horwood, Mrs A. E. 276  
 Hunter, Bishop 444  
 Hutton-Brown, E. J. 113, 443  
  
 I.C.E.V.H. (I.C.E.B.Y.) 208, 262  
 Immerman, Cantor A. 462-463  
 Indian Blind, Division of 318-329  
 Indian Affairs, Dept. of 417, 418  
  
 Jacobs, I. J. 28, 317, 334, 396, 398  
 Jacques, G. H. P. 114  
 Jagganath, H. 416  
 Jane Furse Hospital 288  
 Jervis, L. C. 187, 188, 229, 230, 256, 264, 270,  
 426  
 Johannesburg Society for Civilian Blind 1, 24-  
 27, 62, 63, 64, 92, 93, 94, 157, 159, 164, 189,  
 190, 194, 391, 423-426  
  
 Kahn, E. A. 321  
 Keller, Dr Helen 200-203  
 Kimberley Society for the Blind 444-446  
 Kingwilliam's Town Society 171, 448  
 Kirsten, A. D. 47, 111, 125, 278  
 Kocks, D. J. 156  
 Koff, P. N. 339  
 Kops, C. W. 286, 457  
 Krause, Miss G. 23  
**Kempff, J. G. 113**  
 Kros, Mrs I. 444, 445  
 Kruger, E. J. J. 122, 163, 167, 169, 238, 239,  
 241, 245-247, 249, 393  
 Kruger, Mrs M. 163, 246, 393  
 Kruger, J. P. (Piet) 13, 258, 459-460  
 Kuschke, G. A. C. 148

- Labour, Dept of 72, 78, 117, 151, 152, 153, 157, 228, 235, 240, 250, 251
- Lambert, Miss G. 414
- Lawrence, Mrs I. J. 71, 411, 425
- Lawrence, S. H. 27
- Lazarus, A. N. 321
- League of Friends of the Blind 28, 316, 332, 337, 338, 346, 396-398
- Lenmer, H. R. 422
- Lennox, Mrs 425
- Levey, L. 194, 213, 441
- Lewin, M. P. 317, 318, 334, 339, 398
- Lighthouse Club 164, 227, 449-450
- Lions International 353, 354, 397, 426
- Lord, C. K. 338, 400, 401
- Loubser (Brothers) 14
- Macfarlane, V. H. 191
- Madeley, Min. 83
- Malan, C. W. 422, 423
- Malan, D. C. 123, 393
- Malan, Dr D. F. 48, 66, 202, 291
- Malan, Mrs M. 291
- Malan, P. D. 309
- Malan, Miss S. 11
- Marais Brothers 17
- Mardon, A. 377
- Marks, Mrs M. 112, 113, 149, 171, 178, 182
- Marlow, A. B. W. 29, 163, 171, 178, 193, 212, 213, 222, 224, 238, 254, 259, 262, 314, 317, 247-350, 411, 412
- Matthews, H. 99, 179, 193, 233, 240, 269 371-373
- Mayet, I. F. H. 315, 316, 446, 447
- Merckel, H. 315, 317, 334
- Mocke, Dr H. A. 347
- Mok, A. I. 423
- Mostert, J. C. 393
- Mullan, B. C. 309
- Muller, J. J. H. 158, 227
- Murray, Dr A. 2
- Murray, D. N. 128, 149, 178, 220, 238, 286, 289
- Murray, Ds J. S. 35
- Murray, Ds W. 2, 4, 12
- Naidoo, J. 315, 316, 321
- Natal Bantu Blind Society 20, 172, 437-439
- Natal Indian Blind Society 20, 315, 323, 415, 416, 439-440
- Natal Society for European and Coloured Blind
- National Education, Dept of 240, 250, 390, 391
- Native Affairs, Dept of
- Naudé, Hon. J. F. T. 187, 426
- Nayanah, C. 314, 324
- New Horizon School for the Blind 415-419
- Nowlan, Mrs G. K. 21, 26-27, 33, 36, 37, 39, 40, 57, 62, 66
- Nursoo, B. C. 262, 314, 315, 316, 321, 417, 418
- Olivier, L. 194, 213
- Olivier, M. 241
- Olls, R. C. 309, 310
- Oosthuizen, Mrs C. M. 189, 191
- Op't Hof, Dr J. 307, 308
- Order of St John of South Africa 284
- Our Own Blind Fund 1, 18-21, 32, 33, 48, 65, 113
- Palmer, J. E. 18, 21
- Palmer Hospital 280-284, 288
- Park, R. L. 393, 441
- Paterson, G. 9, 12
- Paulse, F. W. 317
- Pauw, Joh. C. 163, 164
- Pauw, Theo 147, 236, 238, 261, 262, 266, 267, 324, 358-364, 406, 409
- Peach, P. P. 238, 249, 250, 262, 420, 421
- Pederson, Mrs 13
- Perold, Ds P. J. 49, 57
- Peters, F. A. 179, 213, 238, 380-382
- Pienaar, J. J. (Koot) 10
- Pitt, G. 234
- Port Elizabeth Society for the Blind 1, 29, 100, 430-432
- Prescott-Smith, J. J. 60, 61, 62, 71, 105-108, 113, 429
- Pretoria Society for the Blind 29, 100, 159, 183, 426-428
- Pretorius, L. N. F. 213, 250, 270, 309
- Prinshof School for Partially Sighted 412, 419-421
- Rabie, Ds C. 2, 4
- Raborife, Sister P. 292
- Ramsdale, E. 396, 446
- Rawbone, Miss L. 72, 119
- Reitz, Dr H. 79
- Resource Centre, Lesotho 265, 268
- Rhoda, H. 315, 317, 318, 334, 339, 444
- Robertshaw, Mrs F. 441

- Rogers, Miss M. 93, 149, 289, 424  
 Royal, N. I. B. 23, 92, 166, 240, 245, 366, 407  
 Roux, H. B. 232  
 Rowland, W. P. 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 262, 265, 267, 297, 336, 377-380  
 Russell, J. H. 149  
 Ruthven, Mrs R. E. 220  
 Ryan, Dr R. 305  
 Rycroft, Dr B. W. 305
- S.A. Blind Workers Organization 121, 122, 124, 151, 154, 156, 157, 164, 168, 169, 228, 232, 246, 247, 254, 256, 367, 391  
 S.A. Guide Dogs Association 398-401  
 S.A. Institute for Medical Research 295  
 S.A. Library for the Blind 1, 21-24, 33, 39, 48, 56, 64, 164, 165, 199, 210, 245, 263, 351, 387-391, 393  
 Schell, Dr P. D. 295  
 Schermbrucker, G. S. 158, 159, 193, 213, 214, 219, 224, 225-227, 233, 239, 308  
 Schermbrucker, Mrs M. 47, 225  
 Schoeman, Miss. I. 6  
 Schoyerer, Dr R. 296  
 Schwartz, A. J. C. 123, 130, 391, 393  
 Scott, Dr J. Graham 296, 301  
 Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped 339  
 Simonis, D. 4  
 Singh, J. Kissoon 315, 316, 321  
 Sitaram, S. K. 324  
 Smith, Miss H. 256, 267, 268  
 Soanes, N. F. 229, 269, 271  
 Social Welfare, Dept of 78, 89, 94, 110, 114, 128, 129, 188, 250, 313, 315  
 Solms, J. R. 167, 263, 413-414  
 Spurling, Miss E. M. 367, 389  
 Stander, F. F. 228, 231  
 Stayt, Dr H. 77, 136  
 St. Dunstan's 35, 37, 40, 42, 43, 73, 136, 139, 193  
 Steenkamp, Miss A. G. 189  
 St John Eye Hospital 294  
 St John Mobile Unit 299  
 St Joseph's Mission, Swaziland 267  
 Stokes, C. S. 195  
 Swaziland Society for the Handicapped 267  
 Sweet, S. 441  
 Swart, H. 446, 447
- Tape Aids for the Blind 401-403  
 Taylor, Dr I. B. 301  
 Tennant, J. 118, 366  
 Thomas, Mrs C. 218  
 Tothill, H. A. 111, 112, 114, 178, 238  
 Transcription Bureau 164, 166, 168, 246  
 Transvaal Association for Adult Blind Blacks 450  
 Transvaal Society for Worcester Parents 450  
 Transvaal Society for Indian Blind 327, 339  
 Transvaal Society for Bantu Blind 157, 160, 170, 229, 231, 442-443  
 Tucker, A. C. 273, 426
- Union Education Dept 39, 48, 53, 93, 101, 104, 118, 206, 405, 412
- Valentine, Miss R. 94  
 Van Antwerp, Dr C. M. 172, 415  
 Van Aswegen, Mrs 449  
 Van der Berg, Miss M. J. 422  
 Van der Merwe, P. J. 420  
 Van der Poel, J. 410  
 Van der Spuy, Miss A. 169  
 Van der Walt, J. C. 36, 37  
 Van der Walt, S. J. 309, 310  
 Van Eeden, J. 165, 166, 245, 395, 406, 407  
 Van Niekerk, D. 235, 239  
 Van Niekerk, J. H. 151-152, 157, 163, 185  
 Van Rensburg, K. 408  
 Van Schalkwijk, Dr L. 35, 36, 39, 53, 55, 57, 64, 66, 67, 72, 76, 95, 100, 101, 102, 103, 106, 112, 115, 147, 151, 155, 158, 161, 167, 171, 178, 181, 183, 193, 195, 196, 199, 204-209, 223, 224, 249, 260, 276, 284, 416, 419  
 Van Wyk, D. J. 113, 127, 147, 151, 182, 203-204  
 Vaughan, Dr V. H. 149, 150, 151, 163, 166, 171, 195, 238, 249, 250, 260, 261, 262, 314, 321, 404, 405, 406, 419, 455  
 Venter, C. 235, 239  
 Venter, J. A. 402  
 Verster, F. 10, 12, 13-14  
 Viljoen, A. J. 407  
 Viljoen, W. C. A. 273, 408, 435  
 Vincent, Rev. J. D. 36, 45  
 Vincent, Mrs C. H. 36, 37, 39, 43, 44  
 Voysey, W. 441  
 Vuleka School for the Blind 422

Watson, L. S. 228, 229, 231 323  
 Watson, Miss M. T. 42, 121, 131, 166, 179,  
 240, 272-375  
 Wentworth, S. K. 147, 193, 213, 261, 284, 285,  
 297, 304, 309, 317, 375-377  
 Whitaker, Miss E. 179, 182  
 White, A. McKellar 194, 213, 214, 218, 220,  
 240  
 Wiley, Mrs H. 36, 42, 43, 132, 171, 286, 433  
 Williams, B. 317, 318, 332, 334  
 Wilson, A. 403  
 Wood, Miss J. E. 20, 21, 23, 24, 32, 33, 36, 37,  
 45, 48, 111, 149, 179, 196, 240, 360-367  
 Worcester School for the Blind 1, 6, 7, 11, 15,  
 33, 48, 64, 88, 95, 100, 118, 147, 157, 164, 187,  
 236, 267, 352, 358, 393, 395, 404-410  
 Worcester Workshops and Homes 271, 433-  
 436  
 Wright, Dr C. W. 155, 209  
 Yacoob, Z. M. 315, 321, 418  
 Yardley, Miss E. 411  
 Zeelie, A. C. 245, 357  
 Zulu, Prince Joseph 423







HV2175 Vaughan, V  
 V465 FIFTY YEARS  
 1929-1979:  
 THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
 FOR THE BLIND. Date

10/28/83

HV2175  
 V465  
 Vaughan, V.H.  
 FIFTY YEARS OF SE  
 1979: THE STORY O  
 AFRICAN NATIONAL  
 THE BLIND.

DATE

10/28/83 Lisa  
 2/26/87 David  
 1984/85

AMERICAN FOU  
 15 W  
 NEW

perseverance on the other. The beginning of virtually every single undertaking was very modest, odds against success were sometimes overwhelming, growth came gradually, but the fruits were richly rewarding.

A feature of the element of service is the role played by blind persons themselves in the activities of the Council. Several of them serve on the Executive Committee and the special committees of Council. In fact, the Editor of the Council's journal, *Imfama*, is a blind person, as is also the Director of the National Council. In this regard Mr Pauw remarks: "There is abundant evidence in the pages of this chronicle of the highly satisfactory and most fruitful partnership between the blind and the sighted in the gradual establishment of a better dispensation for the visually handicapped in South Africa."

The National Council has, apart from its co-ordinating function, applied itself mainly to the development of projects of a national character, and has achieved remarkable success. This includes the prevention of blindness, the rehabilitation of the newly-blinded, and the placement of the visually handicapped in open labour. Its Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness has already gained international recognition.

Everything that has been recorded in this history has been achieved through human endeavour. It is therefore fitting to pay homage to those devoted and knowledgeable pioneers who were responsible for the founding and developing of the South African National Council for the Blind.

Perskor